

Representations of the Child and Childhood in Francis Hodgson Burnett's Children's Novels

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Francis Hodgson Burnett's (1849-1924) representations of the child and childhood in her best-known children's novels: *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886/1986), *A Little Princess* (1905/2019), and *The Secret Garden* (1911/1999). Specifically, I argue that Burnett's novels illustrate the Romantic concept of the child and childhood. I also contend that the influences of Romanticism can be seen in her use of the narrative device of fortune reversal and, most importantly, in her portrayals of the child characters. Based on Bixler's (1980) definition of the georgic ideal of Romanticism, I examine the three novels and discuss how they fit into this category. In general, all the child characters redeem others with their intrinsic nobility and innocence by giving rebirth and happiness to those around them and thus embody the georgic ideal of the child. While *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess* may better represent the georgic ideal of the child, *The Secret Garden* is more concerned about what the ideal childhood entails.

Keywords: childhood, Romanticism, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, *The Secret Garden*

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Introduction

Francis Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924) is now chiefly known as a children's writer, though during her publishing career of over fifty-five years she mostly wrote formulaic, popular romance for adults. Critics generally recognize Burnett as a representative writer for the "golden age" of children's literature, which is considered to begin in the mid-1800s and end around 1915 (Clark, 2003; Coats, 2018; Lerer, 2008; Townsend, 1996). Burnett's children's novels—*Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886/1986), *A Little Princess* (1905/2019), and *The Secret Garden* (1911/1999)—were rather popular at the time, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden* have been acclaimed by critics as classics of children's literature (e.g., Clark, 2003; Lerer, 2008; MacLeod, 1994). Generally speaking, *The Secret Garden* is now recognized as her masterpiece because of its thematic richness and literary merits, while *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was the best-seller in her lifetime, "selling over millions of copies in English alone, and being translated into more than a dozen languages" (Thwaite, 1994, p. 94).

Assessing Burnett's contribution to children's literature, Lurie (1990) indicates that Burnett is remembered because at least twice "she happened to tell one of those stories that express concealed fantasies and longings; stories that are the externalized dreams of a whole society" (p. 136). Here Lurie refers to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*. Clark (2003) also comments on the widespread appeal of Fauntleroy's story to both child and adult readers in the late nineteenth century and concludes that it was because the novel provided "models of emulation" and nourished their "aspirations for the ideal" (p. 22). Similarly, MacLeod (1994) attributes the success of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* to "an adult taste for a highly romanticized view of childhood" (p. 78). The fact

that Burnett's children's novels gained enormous popularity suggests that they not only provide the function of wish fulfillment for young readers but also reflect the adult view of the ideal child and childhood of the time. Such reception of Burnett's works seems to echo Carpenter's (1985) assertion in his study of the golden age of children's literature that "All children's books are about ideals. . . . books for children present [the world] as it should be" (p.1). In fact, Burnett's children's novels present the world as it should be, a world in which children are nearly perfect and deserve a better life.

Burnett's ideal world reflects the prevailing view of childhood in the golden age of children's literature, which arose out of the literary movement of Romanticism (Dresang, 1999; MacLeod, 1994; Rogers, 2008). As Coats (2018) points out, studying the history of children's literature "reveals that ideas about childhood . . . have changed over time" (p. 9). In other words, what people believe about children and childhood differs from one literary period to another, and such ideas will influence the way writers deal with the subject matter. Similarly, Thacker and Webb (2005) suggest that the concerns of a certain literary movement or period are expressed through content and form, or subject matter and narrative approach (p. 16). Numerous scholars of the history of children's literature have traced the evolution of the concept of childhood from Rationalism to Romanticism (e.g., MacLeod, 1994), and from Romanticism to Modernism to Postmodernism (e.g., McGavran, 1999; McGavran, 2012; Thacker & Webb, 2005). Generally speaking, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of childhood shifted to Romantic idealizations, focusing on childhood innocence and goodness, and the children of children's literature became the Romantic child,¹

¹ According to MacLeod (1994), the romantic



one with innate perfection and redemptive powers (MacLeod, 1994; McGavran, 1999; McGavran, 2009).

Burnett's children's novels provide good examples to illustrate the Romantic concept of childhood. In fact, critics have read Burnett's child characters as embodiments of the Romantic child. For example, MacLeod (1994) regards *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as "probably the best-known romantic novel of childhood" (p. 154). Similarly, Adams (1986) and Bixler (1991) analyze the pastoral qualities of Romanticism in *The Secret Garden*, focusing on the healing and restorative power of nature on children. In this paper, I also set Burnett's works within the tradition of Romanticism; however, I argue that the influences of the Romantic concept of the child and childhood can be seen in Burnett's use of the narrative device of fortune reversal and her portrayals of child characters.

In the following, I will analyze Burnett's Romantic idealizations of children and childhood in her three novels: *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*. First, I will discuss Burnett's portrayals of the ideal child image as anchored in a formulaic plot of fortune reversal and exalted with a happy ending. Then I will examine Burnett's idealizations against the pastoral tradition of the Romantic child, based on Bixler's (1980) definition. Although few critics have read *A Little Princess* in this way, I contend that its main character, Sara Crewe, is also a perfect model child that belongs to the Romantic tradition, just like Cedric and Mary,

conception of childhood "idealized childhood as a free, golden period when children were close to God and nature, when 'the real business . . . was play.' At the popular level, the romantic outlook was sentimental, dwelling on children's beauty and innocence. At the aesthetic level, romanticism went farther, surrounding childhood with an aura of myth, seeing in children the elemental qualities of nature unspoiled" (p. 117).

though in different ways.

Burnett's Ideal World

Both *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess* involve the plot of fortune reversal: the main characters undergo a series of trials but are eventually restored to their natural birthrights. In Lurie's (1990) words, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* mirrors "the almost universal childhood fantasy that one doesn't really belong in this dreary little house or flat with these boring, ordinary people—that one's real parents are important and exciting and live in a great mansion" (p. 137). Basically, this plot pattern also applies to *A Little Princess* except that Cedric is like a fairy prince while Sara Crewe, a princess. This reversal of fortune theme works somewhat differently in *The Secret Garden*. This novel also ends happily when Mary and Colin are converted to goodness and generosity and restored to their natural birthright, "which in this case is not temporal but spiritual, not money and position, but what Frances Hodgson Burnett considered the natural inheritance of mankind—love and joy" (Lurie, 1990, p. 142).

The narrative device of fortune reversal and a happy ending are common in Victorian Romantic fiction, and this is probably why some critics regard Burnett as a "relic of Victorianism" (Bixler, 1984, p. 1). Burnett's biographers find "her fondness for illusions and happy endings a central theme of her life and fiction" (Bixler, 1984, p. 4). Vivian Burnett also labeled his mother "the Romantic Lady" with magic power to bring about happy endings. However, biographer Ann Thwaite points out that Burnett's vivid imagination "frequently led her to a dishonest denial of unpleasant realities in her life and fiction" (cited in Bixler, 1984, p. 4).

Burnett preferred happy endings on the basis of a firmly held and clearly stated belief: "There ought to be a tremendous lot of natural splendid happiness in the life of every human being. . . . The acceptance



of the belief that this is only a world of sorrows is hideous and ought to be exterminated” (Thwaite, 1995, pp. 75-76). The fictional world she created is based on this belief and all her stories end happily. In addition, Burnett’s earlier life experience—rags-to-riches story—may also help explain her predilection for an idealistic dream world. Burnett’s family originally lived a comfortable life until her father died unexpectedly when she was three, leaving the family in difficult financial circumstances. As Dickinson (1986) points out, “anyone living that life is bound to have dreams of another life she might have lived, a world where everything is grand and beautiful and easy, and a child can have absolutely everything she wants” (p. 222). Invariably, Burnett’s stories present an ideal world that provides wish fulfillment.

Bixler (1980) claims that *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden* all belong to the georgic ideal of the pastoral tradition.² According to Bixler, the traditional georgic ideal of Romanticism stresses “a cooperative relationship between man and nature, between man and man” (p. 86); moreover, in nineteenth-century children’s literature, the georgic ideal sees the child as “an agent of rebirth in others” (p. 87). The child portrayed is “exemplary and atypical” and his “virtues are worthy and capable of adult emulation” (p. 87). However, the georgic ideal focuses on the idealized child, not the idealized childhood itself. Based on Bixler’s definition, my discussion that follows will consider how the three novels fit into the category of the

² Bixler (1980) distinguishes two kinds of traditional pastoral ideals: the bucolic and the georgic ideals. The bucolic ideals stress “a receiving of nature’s sustenance with a minimum of work, an easy companionship with friends with a minimum of social responsibility, and an immersion in the present with little sense of passing time” (p. 86). *Tom Sawyer* is an example of the bucolic idealization of childhood.

georgic ideal.

Little Lord Fauntleroy

MacLeod (1994) praises *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as “probably the best-known romantic novel of childhood that passed as a novel for children” and points out that “Burnett folds into Cedric’s character every element of the romantic idea of children: physical beauty, innocence, personality, nobility of spirit, and the power of redemption” (p. 154). Bixler (1980) also observes that the portrait of Cedric follows the literary tradition of the georgic ideal of the child, which stresses innocence and beauty in the exemplary child and presents the child as the agent of rebirth in others. Viewed in this tradition, Cedric is truly a perfect model child.

From the beginning of the story to the end, wherever Cedric goes, people are impressed not only by his physical beauty but also by his noble personality and charming manners. Burnett’s description of childish perfection is vividly detailed and sentimentally excessive. Cedric “was so beautiful to look at that he was quite a picture” (p. 16). In this picture, we are enchanted with his curly “gold-colored hair,” “his brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face” (p. 16). Everyone could recognize in an instant that “his beauty was something unusual. He had a strong, light, graceful little body and a manly little face” (p. 36). Moreover, “he had so sweet a temper and ways so charming that he was a pleasure to everyone” (pp. 15-16). He is always cheerful, graceful, brave, and innocently friendly. Consequently, he makes friends everywhere regardless of age and class. In America, his best friends are the apple woman, the grocer, Mr. Hobbes, and the bootsmith, Dick. On the ship bound for England, people found “the innocence and seriousness of his round childish face” irresistible and “everyone liked him” (pp. 62-63). He even wins the heart of the Earl of Dorincourt at their first meeting.



The Earl was surprised that “his grandson would be like that. It seemed almost too good to be true . . . this little fellow with so much beauty and such a brave, childish grace” (p. 86). In a word, people always fall in love with Cedric at first sight.

Cedric’s tremendous popularity probably “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. It made himself very quick to understand the feelings of those about him” (pp. 16-17). The knowledge that he is an heir to the Earl does not change him at all. He gives all the money his grandfather gave him to his poor friends without thinking about himself.

Little Fauntleroy’s affectionate nature and innocent faith in the goodness of humankind are the main qualities that foster his friendship with the old Earl. Cedric is “innocently friendly”; he “took [his grandfather] for a friend and treated him as one, without having any doubt of him at all” (p. 86). He simply believes in his grandfather’s generosity and kindness. It never occurs to him that all his grandfather has done to him was out of selfish interest—simply because he wanted an heir. Without any doubt in his grandfather, Cedric expresses his gratitude on behalf of the twenty-seven people whose lives have been improved because of his grandfather’s money, saying, “I think you must be the best person in the world. You are always doing goodness . . . and thinking about other people” (p. 119). Such innocence and faith brings out the good in the old Earl, who has been self-indulgent, hard-hearted and worldly all his life, never caring for anyone, even his own children.

Cedric’s character as an unselfish, considerate, simple, and generous person is in a sharp contrast to the old Earl’s. In his seventy years, “there had been neither generous deeds nor kind thoughts” (p. 121).

He “had used his youth and strength and wealth and power only to please himself” (p. 121). As his old age approaches, he is “solitary and without real friends in the midst of all his splendid wealth” (P. 121). There are “people who disliked or feared him, and people who would flatter and cringe to him, but no one who really cared whether he lived or died” (p. 122). He is not really loved by anyone, “because in all his life he had never really loved anyone but himself” (p. 51).

Cedric is a redemptive force, bringing happiness and love to a lost soul. The old Earl has “never deigned to care what opinion the world held of him” (p. 122). However, as he sees “each of his ugly, selfish motives changed into a good and generous one by the simplicity of a child,” he cannot help but reflect upon his life. He does so only because “a child had believed him better than he was, and by wishing to follow in his illustrious footsteps and imitate his example, had suggested to him the curious question whether he was exactly the person to take as a model” (p. 122). As they grow more intimate, the old Earl finds for the first time in his life that he cares about what his grandson thinks of him. He cares about his grandson because he loves him: “Sometimes in secret he actually found himself wishing that his own past life had been a better one” (pp. 145-146). He does not want his grandson to find out that he has been called “the wicked Earl of Dorincourt.” When the Earl’s sister, Lady Lorridaile visits the castle, she finds that her brother is “a changed man in a measure . . . he is being made into a human being, through nothing more or less than his affection for that innocent, affectionate little fellow” (p.164). When an imposter heir appears, the old Earl feels miserable because Cedric has become the central forces in his life. As he confesses to Mrs. Errol, “I am fond of him. 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.



I am satisfied to think of his taking his place some day as the head of the family” (p. 196).

Little Lord Fauntleroy is an example of the traditional “Redemptive Child” (Macleod, 1994, p. 80). He redeems a fallen adult through his innocence. Though he has been taught by his mother to always look for goodness in people, his nobility is basically intrinsic. He faces some tests of his virtue, for example, his separation from his mother and the threat of an imposter heir, but the tests are minor and his character never changes.

A Little Princess

While little Fauntleroy is like a fairy prince, Sara Crewe is a fairy-tale princess. Though both are characters of perfection, the portrayal of Sara Crewe tends to be more realistic. Unlike Little Fauntleroy, whose perfect image is never impinged upon, Sara Crewe undergoes real trials, falling from riches to rags and ascending from rags to riches again. Her trials demonstrate that she is a true princess inside.

Sara does not have as much physical beauty as Cedric does. She is said to be “not pretty as other pretty people are . . . but she makes you want to look at her again” (p. 18). She has “an odd charm of her own. She was a slim, supple creature, rather tall for her age. . . . her eyes were greenish gray, it is true, but they were big, wonderful eyes with long, black lashes” (p. 8). This odd little girl “had such an intelligent small face and such perfect manners” that French teacher Mariette couldn’t help but begin to like her when they first met (p. 19).

Like Cedric, Sara is a perfect model child. “Sara was praised for her quickness at her lessons, for her good manners, for her amiability to her fellow pupils, [and] for her generosity” (pp. 37-38); and “there was something nice and friendly about Sara, and people always felt it” (p. 28). “She always wants to fight when she sees people in trouble” or when someone is “made uncomfortable or unhappy” (p. 27). She

sympathizes and makes friends with those who are poor, stupid, or distained, and she never has a condescending attitude towards them. For example, Sara “took rather a fancy to fat, slow, little Miss [Ermengarde] St John,” becomes her best friend, and helps her with her French lessons (p. 27). As Ermengarde exclaims, “You’re clever, and I’m the stupidest child in the school, but I do so like you!” (p. 36). Sara also comforts a motherless, howling child, Lottie Legh, and becomes her adopted mother, assuring her, “I will be your mamma. We will play that you are my little girl!” (p. 48). Moreover, Sara is kind to the worn-out, starving servant girl, Becky, warming her heart and feeding her constantly. She says to Becky, “we are just the same—I am only a little girl like you. It’s just an accident that I am not you, and you are not me!” (p. 61).

In addition to being friendly and understanding, Sara is also generous and sharing. She “shared her privileges and belongings . . . More than once she had been known to have a tea-party, made up of these despised ones, in her own room” (pp. 40-41). No wonder the younger children, “who were accustomed to being distained and ordered out of the way by mature ladies,” adore Sara (p. 40). Even Jessie, a spiteful girl who is jealous of Sara, has to admit that “There’s one thing about Sara Crewe . . . she’s never ‘grand’ about herself the least bit” (p. 39). It seems that Sara is born with such noble qualities. According to narrative comment, “Nature has made [her] for a giver; [her] hands are born open, and so is [her] heart” (pp. 74-75).

At the beginning of the story, Sara actually lives and behaves like a princess. She wears beautiful, expensive clothes. In her boarding school, she has a pretty bedroom and sitting-room of her own, a pony with a carriage and a maid. According to the principal, Miss Minchin, Sara “has been provided for as if she were a little princess” (p. 15). However, Sara knows



that a lot of nice things just happen to her “by accident” and that her character has never been put to test. As she confides to Ermengarde, “Perhaps I have not really a good temper at all, but if you have everything you want and everyone is kind to you, how can you help but be good-tempered?. . . Perhaps I’m a hideous child, and no one will ever know, just because I never have any trials” (p.38).

The trials come on Sara’s eleventh birthday when she is told that her father, Captain Crewe, died of jungle fever and left her nothing. Her life changes all at once, and “she had suddenly been transformed into a little beggar” (p. 95). Just like Becky, now Sara has to work for her living: she has to teach the younger children, run errands, and help in the kitchen. She sleeps in the attic next to Becky, and she wears old, shabby clothes. Sara works as hard as she can because “in her proud little heart she wanted them to see that she was trying to earn her living and not accepting charity” (p. 110). Sara becomes not only penniless but also friendless. As she confesses to Ermengarde, “she was too proud to try and make friends” (p. 112). But for Becky, Ermengarde, and Lottie, “her child’s heart might almost have broken with loneliness” (p. 113). Most of the time, Sara feels cold, tired, hungry, and lonely in the attic.

Although Sara lives a miserable, unbearable life, she remains true to her character. For example, as the cook comments on Sara, “I lose my temper with her often enough, but I will say she never forgets her manners” (p. 165). Sara reminds herself not to “be made rude and malicious by the rudeness and malice of those about her” because a “princess must be polite” (p. 165). Even when she is scolded and punished, “her proud little spirit would not admit of complaints” (p. 211). One of the strongest test she was put to came one day when she was very cold, hungry, and tired. She had six buns in hand, but she gave five to a beggar child on the street because the

child was “more forlorn” and “hungrier” than she was and because a princess always shared even “when they were poor and driven from their thrones” (pp. 186-187).

The trials prove that Sara is a real princess, and she knows all the while that she is being tested. “Whatever comes,” she says, “cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside. It would be easy to be a princess if I were dressed in cloth of gold, but it is a great deal more of a triumph to be one all the time when no one knows it” (p. 164). According to Miss Amelia’s observation, Sara “behaved like a princess even when she was a beggar” (p. 280).

In this novel, we can hear more of Sara’s voice than we hear of Cedric’s in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. We can understand her dreams and feelings, and we experience her sufferings as an ill-treated servant in Miss Minchin’s school after her father’s death. It is understandable that a girl living a miserable life would try to find comfort in a dream world she makes up. As Sara tells Ermengarde, “I can’t help making up things. If I didn’t, I don’t believe I could live” (p. 136). It is “pretend” and “suppose” that gives her strength when she faces hunger and coldness, and “the dreams she dreamed—the visions she saw—the imaginings . . . were her joy and comfort” (p.212). One day when Sara awakens to a dream room of fairyland, arranged by Mr. Carrisford, she feels “exactly like something fairy come true,” and she is “living in a fairy story” (p. 245).

Sara’s dreams are finally fulfilled when she is adopted by Mr. Carrisford. Sara’s restoration to her original status is not so much the result of her inner nobility as of the Magic: “The Magic has come and done it” (p. 235). Such magical transformation is a recurrent motif in fairy tales. Mr. Carrisford is like the fairy godmother that grants the wishes of Sara, a variant of Cinderella. Just as Mr. Carrisford fulfils



Sara's dreams, the reader's wish is fulfilled by the happy ending of the novel.

Bixler's (1980) georgic ideal of the child as an agent of rebirth can also help explain Sara's true nobility. She helps Becky and other street beggars. She is the force that strengthens the happiness and health of the wealthy recluse, Mr. Carrisford, who turns out to be her father's friend and finally adopts her. Sara is also an example for the bun woman to follow because she is deeply moved by Sara's virtuous act and determined to help others thereafter. Like Cedric, Sara brings happiness and rebirth to those around her and brings out the goodness in their hearts.

The Secret Garden

Without physical beauty and charming personality, Mary Lenox and Colin Craven seem to be a total contrast to the perfect child, Little Fauntleroy. We are told that "everybody said [Mary] 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" (p. 1). Children call her "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary" because her mother was pretty and had pretty manners while Mary is such a plain girl. Mrs. Crawford says, "Mary has the most unattractive ways I ever saw in a child" (p. 13). Mary's mother did not care for her but kept her out of sight all of the time. According to narrative comment, "By the time she was six years old she was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived" (p. 2).

Unlike Cedric, "she was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for anyone" (p. 6). When she heard her nurse died, she did not cry. When her parents died, she did not miss them. For one thing, she knew little about her parents and had never been intimate with them. For another, "she was a self-absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done" (p. 10). At the

beginning, Mary is a spoiled, rude child, who likes no one and whom no one likes.

Similarly, Colin is unattractive. When Mary first meets him, he is an invalid and a spoiled boy, and has become very demanding: "Everyone is obliged to do what pleases me" (p. 166). His father does not love him. Both Mary and Colin are lonely, loveless, and unhappy children.

The child characters in this novel are more realistic than those in earlier ones. Mary and Colin are deprived children, and their behavior has been confirmed by child psychologists (Thwaite, 1995). It stands to reason that a child denied love will behave as Mary and Colin do. It is later through the touch of nature, work in the garden, and their shared friendship that they undergo psychological and physical transformation and eventually recover happiness and love. Mary becomes plumper and "downright pretty" (p. 336). She makes friends with Martha, the gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, Dickon, and Colin. She learns to care for others. Similarly, Colin learns to walk and recover his father's love.

The difference between *The Secret Garden* and the other two novels lies not only in the image of the main characters but also in the character development. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*, the concern is character revelation rather than character change or development. The testing that the main characters face is to demonstrate their inward virtue. The characters do not change, but they are the force that gives rebirth and happiness to those around them. Conversely, *The Secret Garden* depicts a gradual psychological and physical change in the main characters, and this makes the portrayal of character more realistic than idealistic.

The Secret Garden fits the category of georgic ideal of the pastoral child in that Mary and Colin are also agents of rebirth in others: "Mary's reviving touch with nature becomes a model for the invalid



Colin; together, the two children bring psychological healing to Colin's father" (Bixler, 1980, p. 89). However, unlike the former two novels, which are entirely about children's effects on others, *The Secret Garden* emphasizes the influence of nature on children. The relationship between nature and man is one of the features of the georgic ideal of the child.

Lurie (1990) observes in *The Secret Garden* another aspect of pastoral convention that she identifies as the most important feature among classic children's fiction. In her opinion, the pastoral convention assumes "that the world of childhood is simpler and more natural than that of adults, and that children, though they may have faults, are essentially good or at least capable of becoming so" (p. xiii). Viewed in this light, the transformation of Mary and Colin represents such a paradigm of pastoral convention.

Although Bixler (1980) classifies *The Secret Garden* as an example of the georgic ideal of *the child*, I would rather regard the novel as one more concerned about ideal *childhood*. Mary and Colin cannot become "an agent of rebirth in others" if they are deprived of what is essential for children. Martha's mother, Mrs. Sowerby, knows best what is best for children: "fresh air and freedom and running about" (p. 152). In addition, children need other children and a good diet (p. 251). Without the touch of nature, exercise, friendship, and a good diet, children cannot be healthy and happy. In my opinion, what *The Secret Garden* presents is a philosophy of what the ideal childhood entails rather than the ideal child itself.

Conclusion

Although the three novels are similar in the plot pattern of fortune reversal, there is a tendency of increasing depth and subtlety in the portrayal of the main characters. Cedric is a naturally perfect child, Sara has to overcome a series of harsh trials to prove

her inner nobility, and Mary and Colin have to undergo a process of physical and psychological transformation to regain the lost joy and happiness which should belong to all children. Unlike Cedric and Sara, whose nobility is basically intrinsic, Mary and Colin prove that they are at least capable of goodness and kindness once they are given what is essential for children. All these child characters eventually serve as an agent of rebirth in others, bringing happiness and love to those around them and bringing out the goodness in their hearts. While *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess* represent the ideal Romantic child in Cedric and Sara, *The Secret Garden* is more concerned about what makes for the ideal childhood.

In life, the problems involved in making people happy are often difficult, but in art, Burnett can easily create an ideal world by her deft use of fairy tale motifs and the pastoral ideals of the child and childhood. Although her novels demonstrate a continuity with the earlier exemplum tradition of children's literature (Bixler, 1984), Burnett's model child is neither religious nor didactic; her ideal child redeems others by simply being. Indeed, her emphasis on the child's innate nobility and innocence owes much to the earlier Romantic Movement in literature. The ideals of the child and childhood in Burnett's novels certainly reflect the changing values and intellectual movement of her time. Her novels present what the child and childhood should be rather than what they are. The exemplary ideals may serve the function of instruction; however, most children would turn to Burnett's dream world for wish fulfillment and entertainment.



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伯內特兒童小說中的兒童與童年

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摘 要

本文旨在分析法蘭西絲·霍森·伯內特(Francis Hodgson Burnett)在最廣為人知的三部兒童小說中，是如何呈現兒童及童年。這三本經典兒童小說分別是《馮特洛小爵爺》、《小公主》、《祕密花園》。具體而言，本文的論點主張：伯內特的兒童小說應驗了，浪漫主義的兒童及童年的概念，而且浪漫主義的美學，在伯內特運用命運反轉的敘述手法中斧鑿斑斑。浪漫主義的美學尤其在兒童的角色刻畫，更是處處可見。本文依據碧瑟樂(Bixler, 1980)對浪漫主義田園理想的定義，逐一檢視每本小說是否符合浪漫主義的傳統。整體而言，這三部小說的兒童主角都有與生俱來的高貴純真特質，能帶給周遭的人重生與快樂，使他們得到救贖，所以體現了浪漫主義的田園理想。《馮特洛小爵爺》和《小公主》比較能呈現兒童本身的完美，而《祕密花園》則較關心完美童年所需要的條件。

關鍵字：童年、浪漫主義、《馮特洛小爵爺》、《小公主》、《祕密花園》

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