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THE THEMES OF HOME, NATURE, AND REDEMPTION IN FRANCES BURNETT'S WORKS

Annotation

This article explores the recurring themes of home, nature, and personal redemption in Frances Hodgson Burnett's literary works, particularly focusing on her most iconic novels: *The Secret Garden* (1911), *A Little Princess* (1905), and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886). Burnett's themes are deeply rooted in her life experiences and reflect Victorian and Edwardian societal norms. Her narratives reveal the transformative power of love, the importance of belonging, and the healing connection between humans and nature, making her works timeless classics.

Key words: Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, home, nature, redemption, children's literature, Victorian society.

ТЕМЫ ДОМА, ПРИРОДЫ И ИСКУПЛЕНИЯ В РАБОТАХ ФРАНСИС БЁРНЕТ

Аннотация

В этой статье рассматриваются повторяющиеся темы дома, природы и личного искупления в литературных произведениях Франсис Ходжсон Бёрнет, с особым акцентом на её самые известные романы: *Таинственный сад* (1911), *Маленькая принцесса* (1905) и *Маленький лорд Фаунтлерой* (1886). Темы Бёрнет глубоко связаны с её жизненным опытом и отражают нормы викторианского и эдвардианского общества. Её повествования раскрывают преобразующую силу любви, важность принадлежности и исцеляющую связь между человеком и природой, что делает её произведения вечными классиками.

Ключевые слова: Франсис Ходжсон Бёрнет, *Таинственный сад*, *Маленькая принцесса*, *Маленький лорд Фаунтлерой*, дом, природа, искупление, детская литература, викторианское общество.

FRANSIS BERNET ASARLARIDA UY, TABIAT VA ECHIM TOPISH MAVZULARI

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Fransis Xodjson Bernetning adabiy asarlarida uchraydigan uy, tabiat va shaxsiy qutulish mavzulari o'rganiladi, ayniqsa uning eng mashhur romanlariga, ya'ni *Sirli bog'* (1911), *Kichkina malika* (1905) va *Kichkina lord Fonterloy* (1886) asarlariga e'tibor qaratiladi. Bernetning mavzulari uning hayot tajribasiga chuqur bog'liq bo'lib, viktoriya va edvardian jamiyatining me'yorlarini aks ettiradi. Uning asarlari muhabbatning o'zgartiruvchi kuchini, qarashga oid muhimligini va inson va tabiat o'rtasidagi shifo beruvchi aloqani ochib beradi, bu esa uning asarlarini abadiy klassikalarga aylantiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Fransis Xodjson Bernet, *Sirli bog'*, *Kichkina malika*, *Kichkina lord Fonterloy*, uy, tabiat, qutulish, bolalar adabiyoti, viktoriya jamiyati.

Introduction. Frances Hodgson Burnett, born in Manchester, England, in 1849, and later moving to the United States, became one of the most influential authors of children's literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her works transcend the constraints of their era, weaving together universal themes of love, resilience, and redemption.

Burnett's life was marked by struggles, including financial instability and personal loss, which informed her understanding of human emotion and the power of transformation. Her works remain relevant today for their ability to address fundamental human needs: the need for belonging, the healing effect of nature, and the hope for redemption. This article analyzes her themes through the lens of her most celebrated works, offering a comprehensive look at her legacy.

Literature review. Frances Hodgson Burnett's works have been the subject of significant literary criticism. Scholars such as Anne Thwaite (*Waiting for the Party*, 1974) and Jerry Griswold (*Audacious Kids*, 1992) have explored the depth of her narratives and their cultural implications. U.C. Knoepfelmacher's *Venturing into Childhood* (1998) provides critical insights into *The Secret Garden*, particularly its representation of nature as a tool for emotional and physical

healing. Other sources, including Judith Plotz's articles on Burnett's garden metaphor and literary analyses by biographers, illuminate the socio-historical backdrop of her stories.

This article draws on these sources to examine Burnett's thematic focus, illustrating how her stories reflect the broader cultural currents of the Victorian and Edwardian eras while maintaining a universal appeal.

The theme of home and belonging. The idea of home as a sanctuary is central to Burnett's works. In *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe begins in a secure, loving environment, which is disrupted when she becomes an orphan and loses her wealth. Her resilience and optimism, however, help her rebuild a sense of home, even in the bleakest conditions. Burnett portrays home as more than a physical space; it is a state of emotional security and love.

In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric Errol's influence transforms his estranged grandfather's estate from a cold, oppressive manor into a lively, welcoming home. The novel demonstrates that love and kindness can redefine the concept of home, making it a place of emotional nourishment and community.

Burnett's works also explore belonging in the context of class and societal expectations. Her characters often defy societal norms, emphasizing the universal need for acceptance and understanding. In *A Little Princess*, Sara's unwavering dignity and kindness transcend her temporary fall in social status, challenging Victorian notions of class hierarchy.

Nature, particularly as symbolized by the garden, plays a transformative role in Burnett's works. In *The Secret Garden*, the garden at Misselthwaite Manor serves as both a literal and metaphorical space for healing. Mary Lennox, Colin Craven, and others find solace, growth, and renewal through their connection with nature. Burnett uses the garden to represent rebirth and the potential for change, aligning with Victorian ideals of naturalism and Romanticism.

The novel's depiction of nature extends beyond its aesthetic value, emphasizing its therapeutic effects. Mary's transformation from a sullen, lonely child to a vibrant, caring individual mirrors the revival of the garden itself. Colin's recovery from his illness underscores the connection between emotional well-being and physical health, a progressive idea during Burnett's time.

The garden in *The Secret Garden* also fosters community and relationships. Dickon, with his deep understanding of nature, serves as a bridge between Mary and Colin, illustrating how shared experiences in nature can build bonds and heal divisions.

Redemption and personal growth are recurring themes in Burnett's novels. Mary Lennox's journey from a selfish, neglected child to a caring friend and nurturer epitomizes this theme. Her transformation is driven by her relationships and her engagement with the garden.

Burnett brings together the curing of the public and the private sphere in her later novel *The Secret Garden*. In *The Secret Garden*, young Mary Lennox travels from India to England to live at Misselthwaite Manor following the death of her parents. During her time at her uncle's home, she hears rumors of a secret garden and sets out to find it with the help of a local boy named Dickon. Initially Mary is an unlikable protagonist whose unfriendly behavior and sallow complexion are commented on by numerous other characters. Mary's access to the garden and interactions with Dickon quickly improve both her health and her temperament. Meanwhile, she finds her uncle's sick, hidden son, Colin, and encourages him to get well enough to leave his bed and see the garden for himself. Once Mary gets Colin out of the house, he continues to gain strength until he is able to tend the garden and eventually reconcile with his father, Archibald Craven.

Through the story of the improvement in both Mary and Colin, Burnett shows the same ills of the private and public sphere that are prevalent in her previous works and specifically utilizes young Colin's illness to symbolize these ailments across differing spheres. Mary, the only female child in *The Secret Garden*, is responsible for curing the private sphere and encouraging Colin to improve enough to leave the domestic space, the home. Dickon, the most masculine protagonist in the work, is responsible for helping Colin gain strength and guiding him until he is well trained for leadership in the public sphere so that he can eventually reconcile with his father and restore order to the world of the novel. To solidify the idea that the final state of the novel is a return to the natural order of the world, Burnett relies on traditional notions about gender and class hierarchy as well as images associated with the mind cure such as spirit, nature, and the Christian God.

Previous scholars have often made the argument that Mary's role in *The Secret Garden* is to cure the other characters but have frequently disagreed about how Mary cures them. For instance, Elizabeth Lennox Keyser highlights how Mary's honesty to Colin "relieves him of his morbid fear

and sets him on the road to recovery" (7). While other scholars, such as Anne Stiles, agree that "Mary helps to cure her uncle and her invalid cousin Colin," they disagree about where this power to cure comes from, with Keyser claiming it is Mary's honesty and Stiles claiming it stems from the natural world, due to Burnett's belief in mind cure. However, by focusing on the way that Mary cures individual people, these previous scholars have overlooked how her presence impacts the domestic scene as a whole. I argue that the source of the cure throughout the novel only becomes clear when one realizes that Mary's role is not to specifically cure Colin but to cure the domestic sphere, which Colin damages by interrupting the order of the household with his illness and by driving his father away. Additionally, I argue that it is Dickon and not Mary who must cure Colin once he begins preparing for life in the public sphere (as represented by his movement into the garden) so that Colin can take over leadership of their lives and the novel in a way that reaffirms both the expected gender and socioeconomic hierarchy. By taking a broader focus, I demonstrate that the curative power present in the novel does not entirely belong to Mary but is shared among the three children and comes from what Burnett views as the natural world order.

Similarly, in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric's innocence and kindness redeem his grandfather, a bitter and reclusive figure. Through Cedric's influence, the grandfather learns humility and compassion, highlighting Burnett's belief in the redemptive power of love and familial bonds.

Burnett's works often emphasize moral lessons, particularly the importance of resilience and kindness. In *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe's ability to remain kind and hopeful despite her hardships serves as an inspiring example of inner strength. Her unwavering moral compass ultimately leads to her redemption and restoration of her fortunes.

While Burnett's works are primarily remembered for their emotional depth and universal themes, they also offer subtle critiques of Victorian society. In *A Little Princess*, Burnett challenges class discrimination by depicting Sara's inherent dignity and worth, irrespective of her material wealth.

In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, the aristocracy's moral shortcomings are juxtaposed with Cedric's pure-heartedness, suggesting that nobility lies in character rather than birthright. These critiques reflect Burnett's progressive views on social equality and individual merit.

Burnett's portrayal of strong, resilient female characters, such as Sara Crewe and Mary Lennox, challenges traditional gender roles of her time. These characters embody independence, intelligence, and compassion, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of women's roles in society.

Conclusion. Burnett's novels have been read and enjoyed by children since their original publications. However, there have been limited attempts by scholars to connect Burnett's works to one another and to establish a cohesive understanding of the statements she made about children as literary figures and the roles they are expected to play in their society. Previous scholars who have brought Burnett's works into conversation with one another have often focused more on what the works say about Burnett herself or about the time period in which they were written than on what Burnett was saying about her child protagonists. In this thesis I primarily examined the works in relation to the figure of the child. Editha's Burglar offers an example of the way Burnett views the female idealized child, while *Little Lord Fauntleroy* offers the presentation of a male idealized child, and *The Secret Garden* brings together these gendered portrayals of the idealized child to provide a more complete picture of the natural order that Burnett sought to reinforce.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's works are enduring classics that resonate across generations due to their exploration of timeless themes such as home, nature, and redemption. Her stories offer profound insights into the human spirit, emphasizing resilience, love, and the potential for growth and change.

Through her vivid storytelling and richly drawn characters, Burnett not only entertained but also inspired, challenging societal norms and advocating for a more compassionate, equitable world. Her legacy as a pioneer of children's literature remains firmly established, her works continuing to captivate readers with their universal appeal and emotional depth.

The protagonists in all three of these works embody the unique combination of kind innocence and unexpected understanding of the adult world that has come to represent the idealized child. In each of the works it is these exact traits that allow the child to cure the illness in their life: Editha sets an example of innocence inspiring her mother's reform, Cedric places innocent trust in his grandfather and initiates change on the estate, and Mary understands temperamental children from her time in India and knows what actions will cure her cousin. Where these works differ is largely in the way that each protagonist is allowed to interact with their world, due primarily to the expectations of their gender or class status.

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