

**Hannah Swamidoss**

## **“You’re So Yeller”**

### **Identity, Land, and the Third-Culture Subject in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden***

Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) has given rise to a wide array of critical responses – from seeing Mary’s gardening linked to her sexuality to post-colonial readings of the text. One element that such readings have missed is the peculiar displacement in identity within which Burnett situates her protagonist, Mary. At the beginning of the narrative, Mary belongs to no culture, neither the Anglo-Indian culture that she should belong to as an English child residing in India nor the local Indian culture with which she frequently interacts. While postcolonial readings of the text account for some of this displacement, the concept of “third culture” in social theory provides a better understanding of this cultural and political displacement that Burnett uses, and more importantly, Burnett’s value of fixed cultural identity and her emphasis throughout the narrative of changing Mary’s displaced status by having her acculturate to English culture. This reading of Mary as a third-culture subject addresses an important aspect of *The Secret Garden* that has not been examined before and shows a formation of identity and power different from postcolonial models. This reading also highlights the problematic nature of the concept of “home” in the text and the type of subjects who can gain a home in England.

In her celebrated children’s book, *The Secret Garden* (1911), Frances Hodgson Burnett creates a poignant moment when her orphaned child protagonist, Mary Lennox, stranded in India and awaiting passage to England, asks another child, “Where is home?”<sup>1</sup> The other child, Basil, responds with derision: “She doesn’t know where home is!” and then states for Mary’s edification, “It’s England, of course.”<sup>2</sup> Mary’s dislocation from her “home” England emphasizes the other types of dislocation and alienation that Burnett structures around her protagonist. For instance, growing up in India under the British Raj, Mary has no close relationship with her parents or anyone in the Anglo-Indian community. Instead Mary spends much time with her Indian ayah, but even in this relationship, Burnett depicts Mary having little emotional contact or nurture because the ayah lets Mary do exactly as she pleases. Con-

---

1. Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (NY: Harper Collins 1998), p. 11.

2. Burnett, p. 11.

sequently, when Mary's parents and the ayah die of cholera, Mary has no knowledge of any of these events and waits alone in her house until discovered by British soldiers. The culmination of Mary's dislocation occurs when she goes to England to live with a distant relative whom she has never met. The rest of the narrative depicts Mary's transition from this alienated state to one where she has rich and satisfying relationships with various characters as a result of her interest in gardening. To the question, "What must one do to cure alienation?" Burnett seems to provide a simple and easy answer: one must garden.

*The Secret Garden* has given rise to a wide array of critical responses – from seeing Mary's gardening as linked to her sexuality to postcolonial readings of the text.<sup>3</sup> Jerry Phillips, for instance, argues that Burnett reveals the effect of empire at home particularly in the context of identity displacement and class relations.<sup>4</sup> György Tóth, on the other hand, sees the work as a "latently subversive novel infused with anti-imperialism."<sup>5</sup> Mary Goodwin compares Burnett's garden with Kipling's jungle and notes that the garden morally corrects Mary's temperament, stating that "the garden that Mary discovers requires cultivation in order to reach its full potential, and repays this care in turn by healing the gardener."<sup>6</sup> While these readings do take into account the shift from Mary's initial rootless state to her "planted" state at the end of the book, they fail to account for a key element of her cultural displacement. Ariko Kawabata, in her examination of a different children's book, *The Borrowers*, comes closest to identifying this cultural displacement. Kawabata compares one of the characters in *The Borrowers*, the Boy, with Mary, stating that "not only the Borrowers, but also Mary and the Boy, being Anglo-Indian children, are such deracinated beings, lost between the two cultures and two countries. They are not familiar with English culture, although they are English; neither

---

3. Maire Messenger Davies, "'A Bit of Earth': Sexuality and the Representation of Childhood in Text and Screen Versions of *The Secret Garden*," *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television* 48 (Fall 2001): 48–58. Although Maire Messenger Davies examines the film version of *The Secret Garden*, she neatly summarizes the position that sees Mary's gardening as closely linked to her sexuality. Davies sees Burnett combining contemporary understanding of physical exercise (and the need for the outdoors), health, and child development with the sensual and organic aspects of gardening (48–49). She concludes, "The growth to maturity is both personal/sexual and sociopolitical in *The Secret Garden*" (50).

4. Jerry Phillips, "The Mem Sahib, the Worthy, the Rajah and His Minions: Some Reflections on the Class Politics of *The Secret Garden*," *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 17.2 (1993) 168–94.

5. György Tóth, "The Children of the Empire: Anti-Imperialism in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*," *The AnaChronisT* (2003) 117–47, p. 117.

6. Mary Goodwin, "The Garden and the Jungle: Burnett, Kipling, and the Nature of Imperial Childhood," *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011) 105–117, 107.

can they be Indian, though they were born in India.”<sup>7</sup> Kawabata argues that Mary and the Boy as “Anglo-Indian returnees” create their identities through storytelling.<sup>8</sup> Kawabata makes two important points: that Mary belongs to neither Indian nor English culture and that her identity falls into the category of a returning native.

I find that Burnett adds an element of displacement that Kawabata misses. At the beginning of the narrative, Burnett situates Mary in an unusual position by displacing her from the Anglo-Indian community. While the Anglo-Indian settler colony certainly had cultural differences from Britain, England still remained the focal point: England meant home. Burnett depicts Mary not knowing this particular location of home. She consequently portrays Mary residing in-between three cultures: British, Anglo-Indian, and Indian. Although the postcolonial readings of the text account for some of this cultural displacement, a better understanding of the subject that Burnett presents in Mary lies in the concept of “third culture.” The concept of “third culture” in social theory accounts for certain types of cultural displacement, typically where children growing up in a foreign land reside between the cultures of their parents and the host countries. Understanding Mary, as a third-culture subject, and the displacement and alienation that comes with residing between cultures, provides better insight into Burnett’s discourse on identity and the importance she places on Mary becoming acculturated to England.

Understanding Mary as a third-culture subject also provides insight into another discourse that Burnett enters – the changing nature of the Raj. While most readings of the text acknowledge Mary’s status as “returning native,” these readings do not situate *The Secret Garden* as a discourse on the amorphous concept of “home.” The third-culture displacement that Burnett addresses in *The Secret Garden* and the type of gardening that she advocates to remedy this situation tie in with contemporary discourses concerning the British Raj, land, and identity; Burnett’s treatment of the family and the home reveal the influences of these discourses, and the final form of community that Burnett leaves the reader with reveals a paradigm that incorporates disparate elements. To better explicate this position, I will first look at the concept of third culture in social theory, next examine the discourse of return and home, and then read *The Secret Garden* in these contexts.

### **Third-Culture Displacement and the Third-Culture Subject**

“Third culture,” at first, referred to the space people in expatriate situations used for cultural exchange. In “Work Patterns of Americans in India,” John Useem uses the

---

7. Ariko Kawabata, “Sense of Loss, Belonging, and Storytelling: An Anglo-Indian Narrator in *The Borrowers*,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 37(2006) 125–131, pp. 125–126.

8. Kawabata, p. 126.

terms “first” and “second” culture to represent Indians and Americans while the “third culture” represents “the patterns which are created, shared, and learned by men of the two different societies . . . in the process of linking their societies . . . to each other.”<sup>9</sup> In his analysis, Useem argues that the third-culture indicated a shift in power from “super-subordination” to “co-ordination.”<sup>10</sup> The importance of Useem’s description of third culture lies in how it relates to space and power; third culture is a necessary, mutual space that provides room for cultural interaction unavailable elsewhere. To this initial concept, Ruth Useem added the idea that the third culture “is changing culture, highly protean within a rather firm outline.”<sup>11</sup> Building on the idea of equal power in the space between cultures, Ruth Useem introduces the concept of differing uses of power by individuals placed within particular third-culture spaces.

A significant development in this discourse occurred when Ruth Useem and Richard Downie began to discuss third culture as an interior state found within the individual, in this case the expatriate child. Expatriate children lived between the first culture of their parents and the second culture of the host country; the children’s displacement from both cultures resulted in an *interior* “third culture.”<sup>12</sup> One could argue that *all* children begin with third culture, residing in a liminal state before being acculturated by parents or other adults. Third-culture displacement, however, adds an extra dimension to a child’s liminal state, and this type of cultural displacement continues on into adulthood.<sup>13</sup> David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken further explicate the strengths and weaknesses of this “culture between cultures.”<sup>14</sup> They and other theorists noted the difficulty in identifying “home” and a sense of belonging and the prevalence of a sense of being rootless and a “migratory instinct.”<sup>15</sup> Yet the concept also opens

---

9. John Useem, “Work Patterns of Americans in India.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 368 (1966) 146–156, p. 147.

10. John Useem, p. 147.

11. Ruth Useem, “The American Family in India.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 368 (1966) 132–145, p. 135.

12. Ruth Hill Useem and Richard Downie, “Third Culture Kids.” *Today’s Education: The Journal of the National Education Association* 65.3 (1976) 103–105.

13. Denise A. Bonebright, “Adult Third Culture Kids: HRD Challenges and Opportunities,” *Human Resource Development International* 13.3 (Jul 2010) 351–359; Kate A. Walters and Faith P. Auton-Cuff, “A Story to Tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing Up as Third Culture Kids,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12.7 (2009) 755–772.

14. David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *The Third Culture Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press), 1999, p. 20.

15. Debra Ann McLachlan, “The Impact of Globalization on Internationally Mobile Families: A Grounded Theory Analysis,” *Journal of Theory, Construction, and Testing*, 9.1 (Spring 2005) 14–20, p. 15.

up the possibilities of a "portable home" and the strengths and the advantages of mobility.<sup>16</sup>

Ruth Useem, Pollock and Reken began to account for more types of experience (outside expatriate experience) that could create third-culture displacement; the ongoing, "protean" nature continued, and while its outline changed and expanded, the third culture remained recognizable. I would like to further expand these theorists' paradigm to account for situations of third culture within the confines of a *single* culture. Repeatedly in British fiction prior to Burnett, authors such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray create characters with displacement similar to the third-culture model. Austen's Fanny Price and Dickens' Sissy Jupe, for instance, face issues of place, identity, "belonging," and "home" much as Mary Lennox does. The third-culture model, consequently, accounts for disparate cultural variance both within monocultures and between cultures.

A point of intersection that I see with the ideas of the "third culture" and the "interstitial space" in social theory and postcolonial theory is in the multi-valence model that the interstitial space suggests. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* argues that theory ought to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences"<sup>17</sup> and that "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself."<sup>18</sup> The interior displacement seen in the third-culture individual certainly displays a location and site that reveals cultural formation, mobility, alterity, and agency, but this subject formation does not necessarily propagate itself. Like the third-culture kid who does not fit neatly into either the binary of the parent culture or the host culture, the interstitial space does not represent the meeting of binaries but of differing forms of power. This new model of power and space accounts better for Mary's displacement than the postcolonial framework within which Phillips, Tóth, and Kawabata situate her. True, the concept of third-culture theory occurs well after the time period in which Burnett wrote and certainly the British would not have recognized this concept. Yet third-culture displacement can still be seen in the time period of the Raj as cultural interaction increased. To miss depictions of third-culture displacement in the texts of the British Raj would be to ignore an important understanding of the problems and resolutions

---

16. Pollock and Reken observe: "For some TCKS, however, 'Where is home?' is the hardest question of all. *Home* connotes an emotional place—somewhere you truly belong. There simply is no real answer to that question for many TCKs." Pollock and Reken, p. 124.

17. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge), 1994, p. 2.

18. Bhabha, p. 2.

that these authors depicted. Burnett, for instance, locates Mary firmly in the interstitial space at the beginning of the narrative: Mary cannot find mental, emotional, or intellectual comfort in any one of the monocultures around her. Instead of seeing potential in the interstitial space, however, Burnett moves Mary into a new location – English culture. The social formation that emerges at the end of the narrative, however, is not completely English and displays some qualities of Mary's initial state.

Applying third-culture displacement to *The Secret Garden* can raise the question of genre: why does Mary's cultural dislocation, found in a *children's book* with no well-defined genre, merit such close attention? Peter Hunt addresses the problematic nature of children's literature and literary criticism, observing that "as a body of texts, as well as a body of criticism, [children's literature] does not fit into the dominant system's hierarchies or classifications, and consequently, like colonial or feminist literatures, it has presented an irritant to established thinking."<sup>19</sup> Hunt continues to develop this idea by arguing that in the pecking order of academia children's literature is "at the bottom of the heap," but that there has also been a change in academia, "a revolution in critical thinking, that has allowed the subject to be *thinkable*."<sup>20</sup> So while *The Secret Garden* may not be easily classified into a particular genre other than the amorphous category of children's book (or children's novel, novella), its "irritant" nature to established genre has great value. The discourse of cultural dislocation that Burnett raises and resolves in the narrative reflects the particular political, socio-economic contexts of her time, and while this discourse may have a different audience than Jane Austen has in *Mansfield Park* or Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*, Burnett's discourse still engages cultural values and posits moral worth.

### **"It's England of Course!"**

#### ***The Changing Nature of "Home" in British Discourse***

To re-examine the scene where Basil "educates" Mary on the location of home proves helpful in understanding the changing nature of British discourse on the relations between Britain and the Raj. At first, Basil's position seems to reflect the typical perspective of the British community in India, a perspective that consistently imagines and refers to England as home. Burnett's juxtaposition of two English children unable to define England, however, points to the altering composition of the Raj in the early twentieth century. Whereas Mary has no conceptual image of

---

19. Peter Hunt, *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism* (London, NY: Routledge), 2003, p. 2.

20. Hunt, p. 3.

England whatsoever (Basil's response does not really answer her question), Basil, who claims to have knowledge of this "home," cannot offer her a detailed picture of England; he can only inform Mary that she will live with a seemingly unpleasant relative. Basil himself has not been to England; only one of his siblings has visited their grandmother, who resides there. This stance of identifying England as home, but having no real knowledge of it, typifies the latter period of the British Raj in which English domiciles in India had been established, and families spent longer periods in India than they did in Britain. English expatriate children could relate to the fictional Basil, with their own lack of actual experience of the geographic entity of the British Isles.

Basil's identification of home by what is not home, however, has its roots in an earlier stage of British identity in India. Marjorie Morgan, in her examination of British travel writing in the Victorian age, observes that British national identity forged itself in these texts through a series of contrasts between Britain and the local cultures that British travelers visited. For instance, a British subject who had never been outside the British Isles might find it difficult to define "British cuisine." However, a country like France or Germany would offer a contrasting cuisine, and the same Briton, now traveling, could define British cuisine through the differences he or she encountered.<sup>21</sup> While Morgan limits herself largely to examining the formulation of this identity with travelers who visited European nations, the principle she outlines also applies to the initial experience of the British in India. Basil's definition of "home" (while using the opposition of India to define England) is problematic because Basil has nothing in his experience with which to truly contrast India. Instead, when Mary travels to England, she understands different elements of English culture by contrasting England to India. More importantly the "India" that Mary uses to understand England is not Anglo-Indian India but the India of Mary's ayah and the other servants.

Mary's use of India to puzzle out English identity neatly encapsulates the history of the Raj and the formulation of British identity in this context. Using Morgan's model, the initial transient British presence in India understood English identity by what was not-English in India. The concept of Britain as home, therefore, took on very similar forms to the British who traveled in other parts of the world. India became a useful foil to British identity; Britain provided geographical stability to its citizens who traveled back and forth from it. With the Indian mutiny of 1857 and the subsequent British political involvement and creation of a larger infrastructure, a British settler colony began to form. Once women were allowed to travel and re-

---

21. Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave), 2001.

side in India, the British presence in India became much more fixed to location. In establishing households in India, the British community began to raise an expatriate generation that still viewed England as home but had no direct experience of it as a geographical or cultural entity. While the forging of British identity still occurred in contrast to India, England had become equally “other” in direct experience to the expatriate community of the Raj.

In this context of the changing countenance of the Raj, Georgina Gowans examines how the concept of returning to England became very important to the British community in India, no matter how nebulous a form the “return” took. This concept of Britain as “home” had several facets: the idea of return, the idea of Britain as a general home, and the idea of the particular home to which the family would return both in its location and status. Gowans argues that “repatriation to Britain continued to be seen as critical to the maintenance of imperial rule . . . and, as portrayed as home, images of Britain concentrated on a number of established themes frequently emphasizing a patrician lifestyle based on rurality, domesticity and tradition.”<sup>22</sup> The reality of this return was quite different. In the mid- to late-1800s, repatriates could expect to establish an aristocratic lifestyle in Britain through monetary acquisitions made in India.<sup>23</sup> However, toward the turn of the century, the purchasing power of these fortunes had altered, and repatriates settled in suburban areas and in much smaller establishments. The depiction of England in both these contexts, nevertheless, focused on the land and its restorative powers, whether it was a country estate or property close to a spa town.<sup>24</sup> Gowans emphasizes that this rhetorical position of England as home (shored up in many ways, even in advertisements for tea) was important to the imperial enterprise.<sup>25</sup> It presented the British presence in India as elitist but not local; toiling in the colonies would yield its just rewards.

A different aspect of the trope of return that Gowans examines is the actual experiences of women in the early twentieth century who traveled between India and Britain, and who did not always find the periods in Britain pleasant. Domiciles in India could not be acknowledged as “home,” but the realities of these domiciles and the amount of time spent in India frequently made visits to Britain less than satisfactory.<sup>26</sup> The slippage between homes in India and homes in Britain only became

---

22. Georgina Gowans, “A Passage from India: Geographies and Experiences of Repatriation, 1858–1939,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 3.4 (2002) 403–423, p. 403.

23. Gowans, “Passage,” p. 404.

24. Gowans, “Passage,” pp. 408–410.

25. Gowans, “Passage,” pp. 411–412.

26. Georgina Gowans, “Imperial Geographies of Home: Mem-Sahibs and Missie-Sahibs in India and Britain, 1915–1947,” *Cultural Geographies* 10 (2003) 424–441, pp. 462–428.

more pronounced in the changing global political scene. Britain had an influx of repatriates as colonies became independent, and this influx changed the demographics in Britain for both the repatriates and the local communities in the areas in which they settled. During this later stage of the Raj, repatriates faced a drop in economic status on their return and faced declining living standards in Britain.

In this historical context of empire and colony, the land took on great value. The physical entity of the British Isles not only shaped identity but anchored it. Instead of viewing the land only as a source of economic wealth as the Fabians did, the discourse over the British landscape in the context of empire invested the land with different worth: the value of having ancestral roots and tradition. In the rhetoric surrounding the land, nostalgia played a key role; expatriates in the colonies spoke longingly about the comfort and restorative powers of the English landscape. For returning Britons, acculturation to both the representation of the imagined English countryside and to the actualities it presented was required for successful repatriation.

Elizabeth Buettner notes that British rhetoric of this period saw a need for expatriate-English children to return home because of concerns over education, health, and the types of knowledge to which Indian culture exposed children.<sup>27</sup> Boys were more likely to return to England first for their education. When financial circumstances made it so that children were educated in India, parents were anxious that their children's accents would set them apart from their compatriots who had been educated in England.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, parents worried that if children continued to remain in India they would be physically debilitated by the hot climate and also would acquire sexual knowledge that was not in keeping with their age. This fear of sexuality and the debasement of English blood (either being weakened by the climate or through miscegenation) segued into a larger concern that if the British remained in India without traveling to England, then the race would no longer be unique or would be doomed to extinction.<sup>29</sup> Returning to England both for education and retirement meant upholding the purity of the race, both physically and morally.

---

27. Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (NY: Oxford UP, 2004). Buettner uses both *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* as brief examples to show how children living in India were portrayed. Buettner argues that life in India as a child was seen either as idyllic or difficult and sees Burnett offering both these representations. For instance, Buettner sees Sara Crewe's relationship with the Indian servant as affectionate and one that indicates happiness. However, the harsh nature of the Indian climate is seen in *The Secret Garden*. One aspect that Buettner overlooks in her reading of Burnett's work is the displacement that Mary experiences in India.

28. Buettner, pp. 9–10.

29. Buettner, pp. 30–45

### The Third-culture Subject, Home, and Social Formation

It is significant that over the course of her writing for children, Burnett portrayed different stages of visualizing England as home that remain consistent with both the points that Gowans and Buettner raise. Burnett's representations of England as home in both *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* prove astute in their depictions of the British community in India, particularly when Burnett managed to accomplish her portrayals from what was commonly known about India, never having traveled to the region. The idea of returning to England, however, made its mark in an even earlier work, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), and here at least, Burnett could draw from personal experience, as she herself moved between Britain and America. Her biographer Gretchen Gerzina writes of Burnett's own cultural hybridity, "she spent her life as neither British nor American but reveled in straddling both countries' opportunities and attitudes."<sup>30</sup> While Burnett capitalized on opportunities, Gerzina also sees a sense of loss in this lifestyle; Gerzina writes of Burnett, "she saw herself as a transatlantic person, someone who longed for one place whenever she was in the other."<sup>31</sup> Gerzina attributes a spillover of this displacement from Burnett's life into her fiction: "It was no mistake that nearly all of her stories and books would have to do with reversals of fortune and shifts in class status."<sup>32</sup> This persistent theme of class displacement that Gerzina observes is certainly clear in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*, but in *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox's displacement is not one of class, because she belongs to the same social class as the Cravens. Unlike her fictional predecessors Cedric Errol and Sara Crewe, Mary's displacement lies in culture; in *The Secret Garden*, Burnett examines the questions of identity, place, and community with respect to cultural displacement. Significantly, whether it is class displacement or cultural displacement, Burnett consistently turns to the land, *English* land, to find resolutions.

America and India prove to be vastly different in their respective relationships to the British Isles, but it is important to note that Burnett displayed a persistent interest in the theme of returning to England. Burnett's privileging of England over the United States helps in understanding the primacy of location that Burnett places on England. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric Errol, born in America, returns to England to take up an earldom and achieves reconciliation between his estranged American mother and his English grandfather. While Burnett does not seem to be as interested in how identity forms itself in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as she would be

---

30. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. xiii.

31. Gerzina, p. xiv.

32. Gerzina, p. xiv.

in *The Secret Garden*, she does explore the means of gaining and securing access to English land in both books. Cedric's displacement not only stems from the death of his father, but also in the exclusion from England that his mother faces. In showing how he inherits his title and gains, through his impeccable behavior, his grandfather's approval, Burnett delineates a rapprochement to the initial access to England that Cedric's mother had enjoyed. This interest that Burnett displayed in the primacy of England as location continued in *A Little Princess*. Sara Crewe, the angelic protagonist, had already lost one parent in India and relocates to England for her education. Her father, financially successful in India, provides her with the means to live well in England, hence the sobriquet "princess." However, as her father succumbs to sorrow and illness in India, Sara goes from prosperity to poverty in England. A mysterious English gentleman redeems the situation through the efforts of his Indian servant and not only restores Sara's fortune in England but becomes her guardian as well. Through this narrative, Burnett portrays the earlier stage of the British presence in India. Sara's father displays mobility in his business transactions between India and England. Burnett portrays him as rich and influential in England, and although he relocates Sara to a city and not the suburbs or the countryside, it becomes clear from the text that he could establish and maintain a household in the tradition of the rich Nabobs. Burnett also depicts his wealthy friend as being able to maintain a luxurious establishment in the city. Again, as in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett does not seem to be as interested in how British identity formed itself as she is in exploring the concept of location. Despite the exoticism Sara brings to the English boarding school she attends, she easily fits in as English; her identity as an English girl is already established. On the other hand, the primacy of England as location becomes even more apparent in *A Little Princess* than in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett did not portray America as an undesirable location in itself, whereas in *A Little Princess*, the harshness of life in India certainly makes India a detrimental place to live. Burnett's rhetoric at this point is typically Victorian; she presents uncomplicated relationships between the United States and Britain, and India and Britain.

In *The Secret Garden*, the textual space that Burnett provides for the scenes set in India amounts to little over a chapter, and this brevity raises the question of whether India plays an integral role in the narrative or not. While I believe this brief portion does present long-range implications to the narrative (particularly in Mary using Indian culture as a lens to understand English culture), the paradigm of third-culture displacement occurring in monocultures is also present in the text. As mentioned earlier, Mary Lennox's cultural displacement is similar to the displacement Austen presents in Fanny Price and Dickens in Sissy Jupe. Although Fanny and Sissy's initial dislocation displays elements of class displacement, by the end of their

respective narratives, both characters remain equidistant from the dominant culture which they have entered (Bertrams/Gradgrinds) and the cultures from which they originated (Prices/circus). The interstitial spaces in which Fanny and Sissy reside have much agency; the final social formations of both novels reformulate around these interstitial characters. Moreover, each character's lack of cultural fixity becomes a moral center: both the Bertrams and Prices can learn from Fanny, while Sissy can provide restoration to the Gradgrinds and the circus. British fiction of this period reveals a discourse on the ongoing nature of cultural variance both in texts portraying monocultures and in texts depicting two or more cultures. *The Secret Garden* incorporates elements of both. Burnett's use of India and Mary's expatriate situation helps emphasize her lack of fixed cultural identity and offers a means for Mary to gain knowledge about English culture. Likewise, Mary being a cultural anomaly, particularly to English characters in the text, reveals elements of third-culture displacement within a monoculture.

Understanding Burnett's use of India in *The Secret Garden* as more deliberate, however, is in keeping with the Victorian understanding of India. By the time Burnett had started writing, India as a British colony (with the anxieties and privileges it created) had been long established and represented a part of what it meant to be British. Burnett, like her fellow Victorians, joined the discourse on India; *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* reflect some of the standard British views of India at the time. Gerzina notes Burnett's interest in "Hindu philosophy and art" and that "like many British Victorians, she decorated her London houses with Indian artifacts."<sup>33</sup> Burnett's interest in Hindu philosophy manifests itself in her attention to theosophy and reveals an additional awareness of India. Burnett's interest in spiritualism, theosophy, and Christian Science became particularly pronounced after her older son's death.<sup>34</sup> Jen Cadwallader observes that Burnett refused to be pinned down to the specifics of her belief, but Burnett's mixture of "New Thought" certainly makes its way into *The Secret Garden*, particularly in Mary's cousin Colin's use of the word "magic."<sup>35</sup> Apart from the initial chapter set in India, Burnett repeatedly makes free-floating references to India throughout the narrative, particularly to climate, the growth of plants, servants, and Mary's observation to her cousin that his haughtiness reminds her of a young Rajah that she had once seen in India.

---

33. Gerzina, p. 117.

34. Jen Cadwallader, "The Three Veils: Death, Mourning, and the After Life in *The Secret Garden*," in *Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden: A Children's Classic at 100*. eds. Jackie C. Horne and Joe Sutliff Sanders (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), p. 122. Angelica Shirley Carpenter and Jean Shirley, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: Beyond The Secret Garden* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications), 1990, p. 48. Gerzina, pp. 241–242.

35. Cadwallader, pp. 121–122.

Moreover, Burnett sets the circumstances of Mary's cultural displacement in India, and Burnett's India and England reflect the contemporary thinking that Gowans and Buettner document. Understanding the narrative in the context of the late Victorian/early Edwardian discourse of India proves fruitful in understanding Mary's displacement and "re-placement" in England.

In *The Secret Garden*, Burnett presents a very different picture of the British presence in India and the consequences it has for its expatriates than she does in *A Little Princess*. Burnett delineates a settled community with several families present, representing different walks of life. Burnett also portrays a class structure within the British community. For instance, she portrays Mary's mother as upper middle class; Mrs. Lennox wears pretty clothes and attends fashionable parties. After her parents die, Mary lives with a poor English clergyman whose family has shabby attire. Burnett depicts the Raj in its later stages when English households had been established in India and many aspects of British life had been replicated in the colonies, including class. The social life that Burnett depicts for the women, one of parties and dependence on Indian servants, drew criticism in Britain. Burnett's depiction of Mrs. Lennox as flighty and irresponsible fits into a feminist discourse of the period, where the memsahibs of the Raj received criticism for their indolence and taste for finery. In founding such domiciles, the British employed Indians as servants, and Burnett's depiction of Mrs. Lennox refusing to raise her daughter and leaving Mary to the care of her ayah also fits into the behavior of British expatriate women which drew the most censure and disapproval from Britain.

This frivolous lifestyle forms Mary's third-culture identity. Burnett links the neglect which Mary suffers from her mother to the alienation Mary has from the people around her and consequently the cultures surrounding her. While haughty toward the servants and curious about her mother, Mary has no real relationships with anyone; this isolation leads to a lack of knowledge which further shapes Mary's identity. Of her own identity, she only knows that she is not Indian and should be similar to the British around her, but that is as far as her knowledge goes. Mary does not know her place in India as a settler; this displacement becomes most apparent through the contrasts Burnett structures between Mary, her mother, and Basil, the parson's child. Burnett, for instance, portrays Mrs. Lennox embracing the lifestyle of the Raj; her behavior not only points to class but also to the characteristic traits of a settler colony. Mrs. Lennox replicates an English social life in India; she clearly has knowledge of Anglo-Indian culture and chooses her own role in this culture. Mary, however, does not participate in this lifestyle and cannot observe or have knowledge of it. While Basil does not represent the social aspects of the British in India, he does offer an example of the identity that settler children had. Burnett depicts Basil as well integrated into his family life; because Basil's parents do not

relegate him to the care of servants, he can absorb the values of what it means to be English and living in India even if he cannot completely comprehend or explain these values.

In addition to having very limited knowledge of the Anglo-Indian community, Mary does not display much knowledge of the Indian community even though she spends most of her time with her ayah and the other servants. Burnett gives Mary some knowledge of Indian songs and stories through the ayah, but Burnett wrote at a time when there were literary representations of English characters intimately knowing local cultures, Rudyard Kipling's character Kim (1901) being a good example. Mary, consequently, appears as a very different character; one that initially resides in-between all the cultures around her, and this cultural dislocation affects her identity. The first element of Mary's character affected by third-culture displacement is her temper: she consistently behaves in a selfish and disagreeable manner. Mary also suffers from ill health, and at first this seems to be due to the Indian climate and not to ambivalence in identity. Later in the narrative, however, Burnett connects the creation of identity with good health. Consequently, when Burnett provides the remedy for Mary's lack of identity by moving her to England and rooting her in the land, Burnett systematically addresses the issues of cultural knowledge, bad temper, and ill health.

In the move to England and clearer identity, Burnett reveals that the type of land in which Mary will be "planted" matters. In this aspect, Burnett did not represent the changing situations that expatriates faced as to residence when they returned to the British Isles. Gowans points out that most repatriates could not afford country estates and settled in the suburbs. Burnett, however, portrays her returning native, Mary, "going home" to a country estate, Misselthwaite Manor, in the Yorkshire moors, and peoples this countryside with strong, working-class folk who live in harmony with the land. Mary, of course, does not possess the financial means to purchase any type of residence in England, and Burnett leaves it unclear whether Mary's guardian, Mr. Craven, had connections with the Raj. Mary's going to a country estate instead of the suburbs shows that Burnett followed or preferred the earlier trope of returning natives being able to settle well. This preference for the landed estate also occurs in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*. Burnett offers Misselthwaite Manor as the perfect site for Mary to gain knowledge, recover from her ill health, and move from the interstitial space to well-demarked ground.

At first, Burnett presents this acquisition of knowledge through a series of contrasts: the servants in England behave differently from the servants in India, the English climate invigorates while the Indian weather dulls the inhabitants, and English soil provides slow fruitful growth instead of the quick and transient explosion of growth seen in India. Burnett reverses the process that Morgan describes in

her study of travel writing; identity still forms through a series of contrasts, but instead of traveling "abroad," Mary "travels" in England. Mary's nebulous third-culture identity begins to change as she encounters definitions of what it means to be "English." The gardening metaphor in the book becomes particularly pertinent in the formation of English identity as it encompasses all of these contrasts. At Misselthwaite Manor, Mary must learn what it means to be British and actively grow into this identity.

Burnett uses the gardening trope to create other characters' identities, and these identities in turn become models for Mary. For instance, the "secret garden," a walled garden, originally belonged to Mrs. Craven; she nurtured it and spent much of her time there. Mr. Craven and other characters begin to connect the garden, that particular *land*, with her. After Mrs. Craven's death, Burnett depicts Mr. Craven associating that particular piece of land so closely with his wife's identity and memory that the garden becomes intolerable to him that he locks it and allows entry to no one. Burnett portrays Mr. Craven's choices affecting his identity and shaping his son Colin's identity as well. When Mary finds the key to the garden and begins to revive it, her British identity also begins to form; she becomes less imperious and develops relationships with both the servants and local inhabitants as she begins to depend on these people's knowledge of gardening. At first, Mary relies on some instinctive knowledge of her own; she knows, for instance, that she must clear the weeds around shoots. But her third-culture identity can only take her so far in her gardening, and then she needs much more specific information about English plants. To identify the shoots, for instance, Mary needs knowledge from the head gardener, Ben Weatherstaff and Dickon, a working-class boy, who can tell Mary everything she needs to know about plants and animals. By offering a progressive acquisition of knowledge, Burnett provides a paradigm for the formation of identity. In the process of acquiring this knowledge, Mary also begins to form relationships with the servants. Likewise, gardening provides Mary with exercise, which in turn creates an appetite, and her health improves. As Mary's identity begins to root itself in the garden, she begins to resemble the dead Mrs. Craven. Mary, like Mrs. Craven, begins to spend much of her time in the garden and also begins to love this piece of land. When alive, Mrs. Craven clearly was at the center of her household, and Burnett positions Mary, who is now healthier, better tempered, and growing into her English identity, to take this place.

Just as the type of land mattered to Burnett, she also placed emphasis on the type of knowledge that arises from the land. The text provides numerous references to the difference between the climates and vegetation of India and England; instead of the quick and short-lived burst of growth that plants display in India, English foliage takes time to develop, but by implication offers something more substantive.

Burnett portrays the “gardening” that Mary’s identity undergoes occurring both in India and in England. In one of the incidents which takes place in India, the narrator states: “She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms into little heaps of earth.”<sup>36</sup> This type of gardening proves futile when the flower cannot take root. Pretending to garden is also one of many things that Mary did in India to keep herself amused; the text does not depict any real commitment to gardening or the land until she moves to England. Likewise, Burnett structures Mary’s disagreeableness as stemming from the Indian type of gardening. For instance, Basil tries to play with Mary when she pretends to garden in India, but Mary persists in her isolation and rebuffs him. Basil then begins to taunt her by calling her “Mistress Mary quite contrary.”<sup>37</sup> Mary does not gain either knowledge or community through the gardening she does in India; Burnett provides no Dickon figure. Whereas Mary *played* at gardening in India by sticking flowers into the sand, at Misselthwaite, Burnett portrays Mary as no longer playing but gardening in earnest by weeding, pruning, and planting. By choosing to garden, Burnett has Mary choose her identity, and this identity is closely tied to the land. Instead of the insubstantial growth of India, the English soil provides deep growth. Similarly, Dickon’s relationship with nature invokes images of both Pan and Francis of Assisi: two Western figures. Consequently, the knowledge that Mary attains also makes her more and more British, as it is a very Western form of knowledge.

The connection between identity, land, and knowledge found in the text reveals the anxiety that “un-fixed” identity creates. The question of skin color and its connection to the land provides a good example of the resolution to this particular anxiety, the “fixing” of identity. Burnett presents a range of skin color in the book: black, yellow, and a rosy pink or white. Mary starts out as a sickly yellow and progresses toward a healthy pink. The racial overtones are undeniable, but there is a subtlety in Burnett’s argument that can easily be overlooked. Mary’s first encounter with Martha, one of the English maids at Misselthwaite, illuminates the particular problem of being yellow; Martha expects Mary to be black, and Martha expresses her surprise (and disappointment) when she discovers that Mary is “no more black than me—for all you’re so yeller.”<sup>38</sup> While “yellow” is typically associated with Asians, Burnett’s characters do not use the term “yellow” in this manner. Both Mary and Martha firmly associate Indians with the color black and the English with pink or white. Burnett portrays Mary as being incensed when she learns that Martha thought she was black. Martha responds to Mary’s anger by saying, “You needn’t be

---

36. Burnett, p. 3.

37. Burnett, p. 3.

38. Burnett, p. 32.

so vexed. That's not th' way for a young lady to talk. I've nothing' against th' blacks. When you read about 'em in tracts they're always very religious. You always read as a black's a man an' a brother. I've never seen a black an' I was fair pleased to think I was goin' to see one close."<sup>39</sup> While natives are still objects to Martha (she wants to see one close up), Burnett portrays a credible attempt toward equality and acceptance, particularly in the reference to the abolitionist slogan "Am I not a man and a brother?" Martha offers this acceptance both to Mary and other characters in the book. Mary, however, by being "yeller," stands apart from both the blacks and the whites; yellowness places her in the interstitial space between being Anglo-Indian, Indian or British. The yellowness of Mary's skin, however, leaves her with no land: not the Anglo-Indian settler claims to India, not the Indian claims to India, or the British claims to Britain. Burnett posits that a choice needs to be made: Mary can remain yellow and isolated and landless, or she can learn, change, and become pink and English. Subjects have well-defined existing categories and need to fit into these categories; being in-between these categories proves untenable, destabilizing, and points to illness. Mary chooses to garden; consequently, she becomes well-defined.

Fittingly, the walled, secret garden offers not only the interstitial locus for various aspects of cultural displacement to interact, but also the resolution for cultural dislocation. Burnett structures the story around the garden in such a way that the garden moves from being exclusive (only Craven and his wife use it) to secret (Craven locks up the garden when his wife dies) to being open once more, but again to an exclusive group. The garden begins as a site for fixed identity; the garden represents Mrs. Craven and English identity through the plants it holds. When "secret," the garden's identity becomes un-fixed, making it interstitial. The garden's potential for creating identity also lies dormant; it displays its own form of being "yellow." Although Mary entering the forbidden garden may be seen as an act of transgression, the garden's hidden nature in itself is an act of transgression. Craven's locking up the garden brings the household nothing but grief; it also represents his own sequestration and Colin's. Consequently, Mary's un-fixed identity and the garden's interstitial quality – their "yellerness" – reveal an ideal match; the transgressive nature of being interstitial makes them both "unknowable." The on-going nature of such displacement becomes apparent; in the case of the garden, it affects the entire household.

The slipping signifier of being "yeller," and of also becoming less yellow, repeatedly makes its way into the narrative in the context of the garden. After a period of time has passed from Martha's initial proclamation of Mary's undefined skin

---

39. Burnett, p. 32.

color, Martha suggests a cure for Mary's yellow skin, "You go on playin' you out' doors every day an' you'll get some flesh on your bones an' you won't be so yeller."<sup>40</sup> Mary immediately goes toward the yet undiscovered garden. While this comment may initially only have reference to skin color, the narrative portrays Mary's character improving and becoming more British as her yellowness begins to slip away. Once Mary does enter the garden and begins her covert gardening, she begins to interact with Weatherstaff more positively; the text points out that she was "more civil."<sup>41</sup> Weatherstaff responds to this difference in her character by noting the improvement in her physical appearance; he states, "Tha's a bit fatter than tha' was an' tha's not quite so yeller."<sup>42</sup> The more Mary gardens within the secret garden, the more her identity and the garden's become fixed, and the garden becomes less interstitial and more open. Mary invites Dickon into the garden and tells Colin of its existence. Mary's growing concern and care for Colin become apparent; she thinks that by taking him into the garden it could produce both a physical and psychological cure, "he might not think so much about dying."<sup>43</sup> The final reference to Mary's yellowness occurs almost immediately after this moral milestone: Martha has noticed the change and declares, "Tha'rt not nigh so yeller and tha'rt not nigh so scrawny."<sup>44</sup> Mary has attached herself to the land and fixed identity, and by her opening the garden to an exclusive group, the garden also loses its interstitial nature.

A problematic outcome of fixed identity and the shrinking of the interstitial space occurs when Colin appropriates Mary's knowledge that stems from the interstitial space and makes it his own. At key moments in the text (the robin hopping up to Mary, Mary's first encounter with Colin, Mary hearing of Dickon's escapades), Burnett has Mary frequently use the word "magic" with references to stories from India about magic to understand new experiences in England. Mary also uses the word "magic" to explain Dickon's extraordinary ability to draw animals (and people) to him. Colin learns of this "magic" (both Eastern and Western) from Mary and toward the end of the narrative makes it into a philosophy of his own for good health which he later expounds to his father. Similarly, Mary tells Colin that he reminds her of an Indian Rajah, and Colin begins to ask her how the Rajah would act and mirrors his behavior. As Mary's identity becomes more fixed and her character more improved, the narrative subtly shifts toward Colin becoming more dominant. However, there is a loss in this transfer of agency from Mary to Colin and the reinforcement of gender roles. Mary's knowledge of magic is much more fluid and

---

40. Burnett, p. 53.

41. Burnett, p. 108.

42. Burnett, p. 109.

43. Burnett, p. 183.

44. Burnett, p. 183.

alive; it encompasses an element of wonder and gratitude. Colin's use of the word magic is more of a means to an end; fresh air and exercise are utilitarian and will produce the "athlete," the "lecturer," and the "scientific discoverer."<sup>45</sup> Instead of the garden being a place of wonder that slowly reveals its delights, once it is no longer hidden to Colin it remains beautiful, but merely becomes a site for his healing. The narrative's privileging of fixed identity also circumscribes new knowledge, limiting it to familiar structures. There is loss and also the possibility of stagnation.

This need for well-defined categories, whether in class or race, has its effect on social formations, but Mary's undefined, interstitial space does not completely disappear. Burnett juxtaposes Mary to her cousin Colin, and the cousins share some similarities in temperament. Mr. Craven's grief over his wife's death leads him to neglect his son, and Colin gets the mistaken idea that he is gravely ill and will die soon. These two factors lead to Colin secluding himself in the house and acquiring whatever he desires through imperious demands or harrowing temper tantrums. Mary defies Colin's wishes, and when he throws a tantrum, Mary responds with anger and threatens Colin that she can out-scream him. What makes this scene so interesting is that Burnett uses Mary's "yellowness" to resolve the situation; ironically, Mary's temper, acquired through parental neglect and her isolation (and repeatedly censured by Burnett), saves Colin from himself. Mary, unlike the others in the household (including Mr. Craven), does not feel intimidated by either Colin's tantrums or his pathos and can address them with her own belligerence. Other third-culture aspects creep back into the narrative from the margins of well-defined identity; Colin's interest in going outdoors (and the start of his own physical and emotional healing) occurs only because the secret garden is *secret* – its unfixed, interstitial quality intrigues him. In forming her own identity, Mary can help Colin learn how to live in community with those around him (even if it is in a rather imperious, rajah-like manner). Colin, like the garden, tries to keep himself secret and walled, but Mary, because of her third-culture attributes, can break down this isolation and relate to him. Burnett presents the paradox of Mary's need to become British and lose the contrariness that she learned in India and her ability to use this contrariness beneficially in England. Despite this paradox, Mary's rooting in English soil and identity completes itself when she restores Colin to the outside world.

Notwithstanding the strong drive in the narrative for clear-cut identities, the final social formation and the picture of the home with which Burnett leaves the reader still has tinges of yellow. Without the interstitial nature of the garden or Mary, the rapprochement between Colin and his father could not have happened; Mary's need for identity and land provides Colin and his father with a model of

---

45. Burnett, p. 356.

exercise and gardening which breaks their isolation. Ironically, Mary's third-culture displacement, which creates such anxiety over undefined identity and the lack of place for this type of subject in the text, also provides the agency for creating identity and community. While isolation can occur both at home and abroad, laying claim to the land becomes the potent means to bring about identity, change, and reconnection. Mary, Colin, and Craven, all isolated figures, have finally broken this isolation and entered into healthier relationships with each other, the land, and the larger community. The grouping of Mary, Colin, and Craven reveals a new social formation that has the potential to grow stronger, but at this point in the text, the community appears tenuous. Although the garden is now unhidden and includes Mrs. Sowerby, Dickon, and Ben Weatherstaff, the it remains the possession of the Cravens, exclusive to their desires and tied to their particular identity – qualities that un-fixed it and made it secret in the first place. The new-found stability at Misselthwaite Manor is only at its nascent stage; the possibility remains that stability could be undermined. The “remedy” of attaching oneself to the land cannot quite eradicate the interstitial space.

Ultimately, the loss suffered in the narrative lies not in the tenuousness of the final social formation, but in allowing no room for the interstitial subject. Although being interstitial causes Mary's initial disagreeableness and alienation, the interior third-culture also demonstrates great agency. The concept of “home” which seems so nebulous to Mary at the beginning of the narrative does not become more concrete; rather, Mary leaves un-fixed identity and takes on a fixed identity to mold herself to this concept. The narrative's solution of attaching identity to the land also proves problematic in the context of the larger socio-political discourse of the time: what if one does not have the means to access land? *The Secret Garden's* final resolution seems to suggest that to have a home (particularly an English home) one must be the right type of subject and belong to an exclusive group.