

**"INDIA IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM YORKSHIRE":
EMPIRE(S), ORIENTALISM, AND GENDER IN BURNETT'S
*SECRET GARDEN***

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Abstract. *The paper examines various, at times surprising, links between the nineteenth century British imperialist ideology (as well as practice) and the beloved children's classic – **The Secret Garden** by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The thesis that is elaborated upon is that Burnett does not merely depict, but in effect endorses imperialism and empires. The word empire is pluralized deliberately: a distinctive feature of Burnett's novel is the promotion not only of the British Empire but of miniature domestic empires also. This in turn serves to steady and, as Roland Barthes would say, depoliticize the imperialist project abroad – especially in India, which, though not the physical/imaginative setting, is constantly looming in the background of **The Secret Garden**. In the course of the paper, the gender issues treated in this novel will also be examined and linked with the larger context of British imperialism.*

'You thought I was a native! You dared! You don't know anything about natives! They are not people - they're servants who must salaam to you. You know nothing about India.'

Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (32)

Tim Morris, the author of *You're Only Young Twice* (1998), pairs *The Secret Garden* with Barrie's *Peter Pan* in the chapter entitled *Impossibilities*¹: his central thesis - despite the lines quoted above - is that both novels (or rather the novel and the play, for he focuses on Mary Martin's² role of Peter and gender anxieties it provokes) in effect ar-

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¹ The title is deliberately echoing, just as the chapter itself is replying to, Jacquelyn Rose's notorious study - *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. 'Children's fiction,' Rose asserts, 'is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child. Children's fiction is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable characteristics of being about something which it hardly ever talks of...' (Quoted in Tim Morris, *You're Only Young Twice*, Illinois UP, 2000 (88))

² The actress who played in the 1954 Broadway musical, and in the 1960 NBC production of the play.

ticulate an impossible, and, naturally, deeply-desired situation: freezing a child's life on the very verge of growing-up, on the brink of puberty (with its no-longer-merely -implied sexuality). Though he finds *Peter Pan* much more disturbing³, Morris states, in a revealing matter-of-fact way, something significant about *The Secret Garden*: "I am therefore an outsider to reading *The Secret Garden*, especially in the sense that so many women now report to me: that the book was a crucial reading experience for them when they were growing up, that they read it more times than they remember." (87) This early sentence, by no means the most perceptive Morris will write on Burnett's novel, is an important starting point because of the way it unquestionably/ first-handedly establishes the late Edwardian novel⁴ as 'crucial reading experience' for many modern Anglo-Saxon women – in other words, more simply, this is the novel that has been widely read, and regarded as highly important, or personally relevant. How and why should this be so, and what aspects of the novel are nowadays regarded as responsible for its ongoing popularity? In addition, what are the implications (as well as the real consequences) of the fact that it was the (intended) crucial reading experience for so many *women*? Finally, and most importantly, what are the connections with imperialism, if any? How is the British Empire treated, represented, celebrated, wrapped up and offered to children - to so many young girls in particular? When discussing all these issues, we should bear in mind that this much-loved novel was additionally sanctioned in the early 1980s: it was officially proclaimed part of the Canon of Children's Literature, one of its 'Touchstones'. (*Peter Pan* was not.)

The novel, at first sight, does not guarantee such a long-lasting success. The story, compared with so many adventure novels for boys produced in the same period⁵, is far from breathtaking: Mary Lennox, a ten-year-old English girl, born (and at the beginning of the novel *living*) in India, loses both her parents in an outbreak of cholera. She survives by chance: a few days later, gentle (yet indisputably manly) English soldiers come across her and, after a couple of unpleasant weeks spent with a large family of a poor English clergyman, *Mary returns* (the word everyone is using unwittingly is revealing because, of course, she has never been there) to England, or, as one of the minor characters in the novel says, *home*. Home is in Yorkshire; a gloomy house on the edge of the moors, with hundreds of locked rooms, one locked garden, and quite a few benign secrets waiting to be revealed. The house belongs to Mary's uncle, Archibald Craven, the man whose unhappiness is equaled only by his wealth - the widower in perpetual mourning for his beautiful wife (dead for ten years), and the father who emotionally abandoned his seemingly invalid son the moment the child was born.

Mary, who is at the beginning of the novel repeatedly described as *too thin, ugly* and *sour-faced* – by a variety of characters - is bored in this great house: awkwardly (for she is not very sociable either), she befriends an illiterate Yorkshire maid, Martha, an old, grumpy, rheumatism-plagued gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, and a red-breasted robin. From the maid she hears the story of a mysterious locked garden – the walled piece of land where Mr. Craven and his young wife used to spend hours, presumably tending the roses late Mrs. Craven loved so much. After her death – which was occasioned by her falling off a tree in the garden – the bereaved husband locked the gate and buried the key.

³ Barrie's creation is at one point termed – appropriately and memorably - 'the expressionistic nightmare of the sexualized children's classic'. (Morris, 107)

⁴ *The Secret Garden* was published in 1911.

⁵ G.A Henty's 80 historical adventures, for example, and H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain novels.

Very soon, Mary finds the key; secretly, she starts reviving the rose bushes in the locked garden, with a great help from Martha's younger brother, Dickon, the poor *nature boy*, a domesticated, class-conscious, non-threatening noble savage. Being in daily touch with good English soil, bracing English climate (and, one is tempted to add, a good Yorkshire lad) influences Mary: she starts eating more, her hair grows thicker and she loses her 'sour, yellow complexion' gradually. Propelled by her newly discovered physical/mental energy, she solves another mystery, that of the cry she sometimes hears at night. In a manner of speaking, she *unlocks* another door in the gloomy house – she finds out that she has a brother. Her brother, Mr. Craven's son (whose birth coincided with the death of his mother), is the apparently invalid Colin Craven, the hysterical 'young rajah' who never leaves his bed, let alone his luxurious, stuffy room. Soon enough, Colin is initiated into the secret, and the second half of the novel is devoted to Mary and Dickon literally placing him on his two (weak, but perfectly healthy) feet. Almost immediately it becomes clear that the two processes (reviving the garden and reviving Colin) actually parallel, reinforce and comment upon one another. The gloomy father, absent throughout the novel, is finally called back home by a dream; he returns to find his long-rejected son – a healthy, athletic, rosy-cheeked boy in the blooming rose garden. The last image in the novel is that of the father and the son walking towards the house, embraced.

Retold like this, the novel in which 'the central plot events include taking extra helpings of food and doing stretching exercises in order to grow'⁶ has, on the face of it, nothing whatsoever to do with imperialism – it is, in effect, what readers would expect of a children's book: a well-written, gently instructive story about (previously lonely) children learning to play together, improving their appetites and their manners, growing up physically as well as morally/socially. As Dickon himself says at one point in the novel, "Two lads an' a little lass just lookin' on at th' springtime."⁷ Yet novels do not become touchstones of the canon committee by accident, and despite serious efforts (by Susan E. James, Tim Morris, Anna Krugovoy Silver) to brush away Burnett's politically incorrect, disconcerting undertones, the support of imperialism in *The Secret Garden* is impossible to miss.

Nineteenth century British imperialism – and by imperialism it is understood both imperialist ideology and practice – is undeniably present in *The Secret Garden* as the source of images, metaphors, and values, as well as the novel's underlying doctrine. The images of and the references to the British Empire and its subjects permeate the novel, as we shall see later; furthermore, they provide the context in which the story of Mary's *re-finding*⁸ her true Self – her national, cultural, and gender-identity – is played out. Not

⁶ *You're Only Young Twice* (94)

⁷ *The Secret Garden*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, Hertfordshire, 1998 (165)

⁸ The word is used deliberately: Burnett presents Mary's true *English* self as something which is genetically encoded, so, ultimately, and quite logically, a couple of months in Yorkshire are able to counterveil (apparently forever) the ten years she spent in India. The identical view was, according to Cecily Devereux, held by the lesser-known Sara Jeannette Duncan, an English-Canadian imperialist writer who wrote only one children's book: *The Story of Sonny Sahib* (published in 1894). "The novel," Devereux affirms, "takes the position that Sonny's racial identity – as an Anglo-Saxon and Christian child with certain salient characteristics – is already intact at the moment of his birth and persists despite his having spent his entire life in India under the care of his Muslim ayah. His racial identity, the novel maintains, is as definite and, crucially, as resistant to external influence as his white skin, blond hair and blue eyes." Cecily Devereux, *Perhaps Nobody has told you why the English are called Sahibs in India!*: Sara Jeannette Duncan's *Imperialism for Children*, *Canadian Children's Literature* 102 (2001): 8

only that, the True English Self is in the course of the novel carefully constructed - made possible, even - through numerous contrasts with/negations of its dark Other, India. Thus, not only are the authority and the validity of the colonizing English Self established, but the essential and permanent 'otherness' of India also. Yet another issue that might be linked with imperialism without doubt is that of the class and gender distinctions (with the unspoken but nonetheless powerful assumption that a particular gender/class has a right, a duty even, to rule all the others), which are treated as absolute. Drawing an interesting parallel, it would not be too bold to claim, as M. Daphne Kutzer actually does, that there are in fact *two* empires overlapping in the semantic field in the novel: the first one (the Empire) is literally as well as imaginatively-metaphorically erected upon the savage Other(s) in distant lands; the second, in which the first one is mirrored, is the domestic empire, smaller in scale, but noteworthy: the Yorkshire household composed of master and servants, of the rich and poor, of husbands-masters and wives(daughters)-angels in the house. Furthermore, the two empires are not only presented and employed as the physical/imaginative setting of the novel - this alone could never support the claim that the novel is essentially imperialist - but the values and principles underlying them are endorsed and promoted.

That, however, is not all. The fact that the True English Self is in the first half of the novel embodied in a girl complicates things even more - it is in the second half of the novel, with the appearance of the legitimate master Colin, that the issues of empire, class and gender intersect in Mary Lennox, revealing the paradoxes intrinsic to the domestic empire (there is implied criticism of domestic empire here, but Burnett nevertheless resolves all the paradoxes happily - and quickly enough - in favor of legitimacy and patriarchy).

As a final point, the intertwining - in a popular children's novel - of the British imperial project abroad and the one back home aptly demonstrates how deeply imperialism was (according to Rushdie, *is*) embedded in every aspect of British culture.⁹

'I never saw spring in India because there wasn't any.'

Imperialist ideology is in *The Secret Garden* recognizable, firstly and mostly, in the carefully constructed, perfectly naturalized discourse concerning India¹⁰. Through the

⁹ Rushdie's beautifully uncompromising thoughts deserve to be quoted in their entirety: 'British thought, British society has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism. It's still there, breeding lice and vermin, waiting for unscrupulous people to exploit it for their own ends. One of the key concepts of imperialism was that military superiority implies cultural superiority, and this enabled the British to condescend to and to repress cultures far older than their own; and it still does. For the citizens of the new, imported Empire, for the colonized Asians and blacks of Britain, the police force represents that colonizing army, those regiments of occupation and control.' Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire within Britain', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, Granta Books, London, 1992 (131-2)

¹⁰ It is worth noticing that this word is repeated over and over again - the readers are never given the name of the particular Indian town in which the Lennox family tragedy takes place, or the place to which Mary is taken after it - in an obvious effort to consolidate the whole country into one flat, highly unfavorable, image the narrator creates. Nor are the native servants ever given face or any humanly recognizable characteristic. Even the sentences are uniform: 'In India...this...In India... that'. (Conversely, when the story shifts to England, the details abound - for example, we are told that Mrs. Medlock, the housekeeper was sent to London, to wait for Mary's arrival; that she did not like it because her niece was getting married at the same time; that the two of them [Mary and Mrs. Medlock] traveled by train, that the old woman 'wore a very purple dress, a black silk

agency of the calm, undisturbed, all-knowing adult narrator (as well as, though to a much lesser degree, Mary's own sporadic, apparently honest, childlike, first-hand statements), India is effortlessly orientalized. The adverb 'effortlessly' is used on purpose: the narrator and Mary never bother to convince the readers – they seem to be merely presenting eternal truths, in clear-cut, matter-of-fact statements. Sentences regarding India – and, in this novel, by India it is understood the whole of Indian soil, climate, culture and people – appear here and there throughout the novel, like sugar sprinkled on the wholesome cake for children, and they are, without exception, infinitely confident.

India is, furthermore, orientalized in two familiar ways: it is demonized, and it is made exotic – and, needless to say, both discourses, different though they are, produce its ultimate dehumanization, thus making any further justification for (imaginative and any other) colonization virtually unnecessary. Literally from the start, and continuing throughout the novel, India is depicted as the site and the source of illness, physical/spiritual ugliness, moral corruption (in the 19th century white culture coded as 'going native') and death. It is also associated with arrested physical/mental development, and despotism.

The beginning of the novel is illustrative enough: "When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen." The first sentence states two facts, first, that Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite, Yorkshire to live with her uncle – so the beginning of the novel (the beginning of Mary's life *proper*) literally starts with what everyone calls her *return* to England (and the implied departure from India) – and, second, that she was reported to be 'the most disagreeable-looking child'. Only two sentences later, our trustworthy narrator informs the readers, that 'Her hair was yellow, and *her face was yellow because she had been born in India* and had always been ill in one way or another.' The origin of her ugliness is thus categorically (remarkably early, also) located: Mary's face is yellow because she has been ill a lot, and she has been ill because she was born in India. The first time India is mentioned, it is immediately linked with illness; this association is ingeniously strengthened by the fact that Mary's parents, Captain Lennox and his wife, die in an outbreak of cholera. India, dark, primitive, unhygienic Other to England, makes one ill; moreover, if one is not watchful enough, it literally kills, in its sly, creeping, profoundly un-English, unmanly and dishonorable Oriental way - by disease. This, if anything, is the textbook example of 'the motif of Orient as something denoting danger' that Edward Said identified in a variety of Western discourses.¹¹ The fact that Mary Lennox's face is yellow and, as will be repeated many times later, sour, adds another suggestion: that of the moral decay *written* on her face¹². Her moral failure, we learn soon, is not as grave and inexcusable as that of opium-addicts, the Englishmen *gone native* who are also recognizable by yellow complexion, but is potentially dangerous: Mary is, first and above all, extremely spoiled and disobedient – for instance, whenever she is angry she slaps her Indian nurse, her ayah and calls her 'pig' and 'daughter of pigs' ("because", the narrator

mantle with jet fringe on it and a black bonnet with purple velvet flowers which stuck up and trembled when she moved her head.')

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Biblioteka XX vek i Cigoja Stampa, Beograd, 2000 (80)

¹² Basil Hallward voices this typical Victorian belief most eloquently: "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the molding of his hands even." Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Penguin Books, London, 1994 (172)

tells her young readers, in an undisturbed, you-might-need-it-some-day way, "to call a native a pig is the worst insult of all."¹³ She is physically *stiff*, thin, and weak. Plus, she is extremely unfriendly. But why should these rather unpleasant traits – over and over again attributed to Mary's being born and raised in/by India – be suggestive of moral corruption? And why should this view be imperialist in origin?

It has already been stated that the two empires in *The Secret Garden* actually mirror one another. As M. Daphne Kutzer demonstrates, one of the favorite, and most frequently used, metaphors of the British Empire in the 19th century popular culture was that of the family – with Queen Victoria as a mother-figure, protecting and guiding her young (the colonies), who, being helpless and ignorant, 'half-devil and half-child', are incapable of governing themselves. It was of paramount importance, then, for the good of the 'children' that the mother be flawless. In the sphere of the miniature domestic empire, also, the virtuous mother/wife figure is vital. John Ruskin adds 'scientific' authority to the popular view in an essay entitled – so appropriately for our uses! – *Of Queen's Gardens*:

And wherever a true wife comes, *this* home [i.e. 'a sacred place', 'a vestal temple', 'a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods'] is always round her. (...) This, then, I believe to be – will you not admit it to be – the woman's true place and power? But do you not see that, to fulfill this, she must – as far as one can use such terms of a human creature – be incapable of error? So far as she rules, all must be right, or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good, instinctively, infallibly wise...¹⁴

The importance of this socially prescribed, pseudo-scientifically elaborated, profoundly detrimental flawlessness of wives/mothers is in the novel emphasized by the fact that Mrs. Lennox herself fails miserably in the role – from the start the narrator states that this beautiful young woman in lacy dresses is alienated from her sick (potentially impotent) husband, from her own (unwanted) child, that she is concerned exclusively with parties and incessant flirting: "...her [Mary's] mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. She had not wanted a little girl at all..." (8) These are distant, but unmistakable hints of her unleashed sexuality, regarded as having been caused by India itself – promiscuity as yet another way to 'go native'. (Even Victorian and post-Victorian fears are, interestingly enough, gender-determined: men smoke opium and go mad, and women, as a rule, become promiscuous. It is also worth noticing that Mrs. Lennox's failure as a wife, a mother and, by extension, a representative of ideal Victorian womanhood, coded as 'Angel in the House', is – in the very first chapter of the beloved children's classic – punished by nothing less than death¹⁵.) Mary, though English and thus, the novel subtly affirms, genetically superior, was born in India, and has been brought up entirely by Indian servants¹⁶, who humor her in all possible ways, who dress her up, who bow before her, whom she can slap and verbally abuse. Mary has to come to England to hear the truth about herself for the first time, because in

¹³ *The Secret Garden*, (35). Mary's slapping her ayah is never commented upon, let alone condemned.

¹⁴ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Norton Topics Online.

¹⁵ Colin's mother, Mrs. Craven, too, fails in her role – she is described as given wholly to sensuous pleasures, locking herself away in the rose garden with her adoring husband for hours – and, significantly enough, she dies also.

¹⁶ "She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants ..." (8)

India people are too servile, and they lie¹⁷. As a result of all this, she is, at the mature age of ten, totally unpromising material for an angel in the house – too tyrannical, too disobedient, too ugly. In other words, she too seems to have gone native. Burnett makes clear that, as M. Daphne Kutzer puts it, 'India has brought out the worst in both Mary and her mother.' (In keeping with this view, Colin is, in his most horrible tyrannical moods, consistently described as 'young rajah' over and over again – the implication is clear: his un-naturally bad behavior is so un-English that no English terms can be used to denote it. Despotism, tyranny, even such small-scale tyranny as Colin exhibits, are, the novel asserts, *somehow* Indian, not British. Even Mary's unpleasant, commanding tone, which she uses when angry, is qualified as 'Indian'¹⁸.) But a girl's waywardness and insubordination, spelled all over her yellow face, tolerated (or even encouraged) in India, are morally wrong in the context of England: Mary is no longer a 'Misee Sahib', whose very ethnicity (combined with the military power personified in her father) grants her unlimited authority over 'the blacks'; in Yorkshire she is a young lady who must learn some important lessons in self-denial, obedience and respect. And here already we draw the parallel between the two empires: both are patriarchal and phalocentric, both are built on subordination – but whereas the Empire subordinates the natives (imaginatively, economically, socially, culturally), domestic empire is built upon the subordination of the lower social classes, plus all 'the female[s] of the species'. The perfect system must never be threatened by disobedient angels in or out of the house.

Yet despotism, moral corruption, illness and death are not the only signifiers for demonic India in *The Secret Garden*. India, with its oppressive, blazing sun, its hot and humid climate and its lying people, is a fairy-tale-like evil foster mother: it affects (better to say, arrests) physical and mental development of English children, of young girls in particular – thus poisoning the very future of the Empire. (The point is succinctly brought home by Mary's self-explanatory comment regarding Martha's mother, "She doesn't seem to be like the mothers in India." (89) If one bears in mind that Susana Sowerby is kind, gentle, clean, pure, loving and wise, Mary's first-hand criticism of Indian mothers – of *India as a mother* - is striking.) There are countless references to Mary always being too hot, weak and sleepy to do anything in India¹⁹ – all leading to the conclusion that Em-

¹⁷ "This was plain speaking, and Mary Lennox had never heard the truth about herself in her life. Native servants always salaamed and submitted to you, whatever you did. She had never thought much about her looks, but she wondered if she was as unattractive as Ben Weatherstaff and she also wondered if she looked as sour as he had looked before the robin came. She actually began to wonder also if she was 'nasty tempered'. She felt uncomfortable." (45) Nearly 150 years earlier, Robert Clive, presenting a speech on India to the House of Commons, made an *identical* remark: 'Indostan was always an absolute despotic government. The inhabitants, especially of Bengal, in inferior stations, are servile, mean, submissive, and humble.' (Robert Clive: *Speech in Commons on India*, 1772, from Modern History Sourcebook)

¹⁸ Burnett does not invent these links, she merely echoes popular views, the views that had been in circulation for almost 200 years at the moment she was creating a 'young rajah' – Clive deserves to be quoted again: 'In superior stations, they [i.e. Indians] are luxurious, effeminate, tyrannical, treacherous, vena, cruel.' Just like Burnett after him, Clive disseminates, with all the authority and conviction he has, the picture of dark, sub-human Indians (both in 'inferior' and 'superior' social stations).

¹⁹ "In India she had always felt hot and too languid to care much about anything." (51)

"In India skies were hot and blazing; this [the sky in Yorkshire] was of a deep cool blue which almost seemed to sparkle like the waters of some lovely bottomless lake, and here and there, high, high in the arched blueness floated small clouds of snow-white fleece. (63)

"In India she had always been too hot and languid and weak to care much about anything, but in this place she was beginning to care and to want to do new things." (71)

"I never wanted my breakfast when I was in India and now I always want it." (199)

pire's children, if removed for too long from the beneficial influences of their mother country – its bracing climate, clean air, its birds (which are 'not like Indian birds') real gardens²⁰, its spring and truth-speaking people – might end up as mentally, as well as socially and emotionally, retarded. That is the undercurrent of Ben Weatherstaff's telling Mary "Tha' shapes well enough at it for a young 'un that's lived with heathen." [You're developing quite well considering the fact you lived among the heathens.] (76). Treacherous India, Burnett insists over and over again, has seriously harmed a helpless child; due to the shared failure of her parents, unprotected Mary has been turned by India into an ugly, sour, yellow-faced, thin girl who doesn't like anyone or anything much and who is prone to tantrums and physical violence. Fortunately for Mary, there is Yorkshire to mend her ways, to bring her back to her original, English, ladylike self.

'I dare say they would like to hear about riding on elephants and camels, and about the officers going to hunt tigers.'

Portraying the site of imperial escapades as unhealthy, unhygienic, and life threatening is not, one might argue, an anticipated move for the novel that is promoting imperialism – after all, the future²¹ Sahibs whom the novel partly addresses are expected to go and spend some time in this – apparently menacing – territory. (Incidentally, Said explains this challenge convincingly as an opportunity for the colonizer to test and demonstrate – yet again! – his superiority. The gender of the colonizer is deliberate.) Another maneuver Burnett employs to dehumanize India, which simultaneously manages to countervail (to some extent) the frightening picture already offered, is to make it exotic, and, perhaps more importantly, to insist on it as the source of real, palpable, material wealth (in this novel exemplified by the 'Indian room' in which the imperial loot is shamelessly displayed, though Burnett will insist on this aspect of India more forcibly – obsessively – in *A Little Princess*). Hence another, essentially Orientalist, discourse regarding India – what Jerry Phillips²² terms the 'rhetoric of mysticism' – depicting India as the source of *exotic wealth* and *intellectual diversion*. For this reason, there are scattered references to the stories and songs of Mary's ayah that she, in turn, tells/sings to Colin²³; the sporadic allusions to bizarre fakirs and cobra-tamers; the image of hundreds of expensive elephant figures carved in ivory that Mary finds in the 'Indian room' and plays with for a while. (This image of hundreds of elephants carved in ivory conveys the essence of imperialism most powerfully: living beings are killed and turned into sign of wealth; sadistically enough, the artificial form echoes that of the living animal.) It has to be noted, though, that contrary to *A Little Princess*, in *The Secret Garden* the rhetoric of mysticism

²⁰ Remember, in India, Mary only *played* at gardening. "She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms into little heaps of earth..." (8) The real thing she finds in England only.

²¹ Of course, by 1911, when *The Secret Garden* was published, the Empire was already waning. The fact, however, was not accepted for a long time in the whole of the British society – and particularly in traditionally conservative children's literature.

²² Jerry Phillips, "The Mem Sahib, the Worthy, the Rajah and his Minions: Some Reflections on the Class Politics of *The Secret Garden*," quoted by M. Daphne Kutzer in *Empire's Children*, Garland Publishing, New York, 2000 (57)

²³ This, however, must not be interpreted as the children's unconscious tribute to rich Indian culture: Colin very soon makes his final choice when he asks Mary to tell him about the secret garden instead of singing her ayah's song. In keeping with his intended role of the nationally proud imperialist, he chooses the story of an English garden over an Indian song.

is not as powerful or omnipresent as the discourse of disease, decay and despotism. But the implication is clear: whether dangerously unhealthy or excitingly mysterious, India, just like Transylvania, is *not England*.²⁴

England, let us invert the argument, is not India. Whereas India is unhealthy, dangerous, threatening and primitive/exotic, England is normal, healthy, and universally virtuous; in addition, it is (gentle, yet irresistible) incentive to all kinds of positive changes. England *is* the center, and the norm. The never spoken assumption is that this enables it to rule the less deserving nations. Translated into the terms of the novel, it is in England, and through the combined agency of straightforward English people, solid English food²⁵ and English climate, that a series of crucial events in Mary's life take place: she starts eating more, and every day she is 'more and more awake' because, as the narrator says, "the fresh wind from the moor had begun to blow the cobwebs out of her young brain and to waken her up a little. (Sic!)"²⁶; she looks prettier, which *does count* in a culture obsessed with angels; she matures emotionally – she starts loving people and animals, which is yet another feminine, angelic quality. In India, because of the servants who always obeyed her, she was a little dictator, yet strangely passive – for example, she could not even dress herself, which is the point Burnett subtly makes – "Martha had told them about the little girl who had come from India and who had been waited on all her life by what Martha called 'blacks' until she didn't know how to put on her own stockings." In England, because of the servant who refuses to dress her, Mary is propelled into physical independence²⁷, and becomes aware of her body for the first time. Furthermore, skipping the rope in fresh air²⁸ and working in the garden make her loosen up her stiff arms and legs –and as a result her skirts fit her better. In a word, she grows up, and she grows distinctly into a girl.

²⁴ I'm paraphrasing the statement from another great imperialist work – Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The key statement that sharply establishes the Self/Other opposition, early in the novel, is Count Dracula's deceptively simple: "We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways." Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, London: Penguin Books, 1994 (32)

²⁵ Food plays an important part throughout the novel, and chapter 24 is especially rewarding: the fare that literally brings Colin and Mary back to life and health is distinctly *English* (to be more precise, distinctly non-Indian) – simple (no spices!), solid and extremely nourishing:

"I'll tell thee what, lad," Mrs. Sowerby said when she could speak. "I've thought of a way to help 'em. When tha' goes to 'em in th' mornin's tha' shall take a pail o' *good new milk* an' I'll bake 'em a *crusty cottage loaf* or some *buns wi' currants* in 'em, same as you children like. *Nothin's so good as fresh milk an' bread.*" (250)

²⁶ It literally goes without saying that the cobwebs in Mary's young mind were planted in/by India.

²⁷ Ironically, Mary's physical independence is limited almost exclusively to her putting on her own stockings.

²⁸ In chapter 8, in an important episode, Mary receives a present from Martha: a skipping-rope. Mary, however, having lived in India, has never seen a skipping-rope and does not know what its purpose is. Martha, shocked by this, slips into Yorkshire dialect and exclaims: "Does tha'mean that they've not got skippin'-ropes in India, for all they've got elephants and tigers and camels? No wonder most of'em's black." (65) They do not have skipping-ropes in India, and that is why they are black. Furthermore, elephants, camels, and tigers, the exotic wonders as they are, cannot compete with an English skipping rope. Not only that, the rope is the shortcut to health and beauty, which are apparently also strictly English qualities. Barkley's imperialist classic *Between the Danube and the Black Sea or Five Years in Bulgaria* (London: Murray, 1877) and his depiction of Ottoman – by extension all Oriental – women expresses similar attitudes: "Their [Ottoman women's] days are spent in stuffy-smelling rooms, smoking cigarettes and eating sweetmeats, and the only excitement of the day is paying visits to other women, or stewing in the debilitating bath. (Barkley, 92.) And: 'From never taking exercise, from being cooped up in close rooms, and from eating so much unwholesome food, they almost lose the use of their limbs, and it is a horrid sight to see them wadding and shuffling along.' (92.) The underlying assumption for both Barkley and Burnett is: English girls/women are not like that. This is considered *so true* that it *literally* goes without saying.

And that is, we could argue, the key to the (initially rather puzzling) long-lasting success of this novel, especially with women - and the reason why imperialism is so overlooked by the readers and some critics. On one, very broad level, the imperialist practice is linked with – presented as a parallel to, or metaphor of – growing up. And a girl's always-traumatic passage from childhood to youth (girlhood) is in *The Secret Garden* depicted as a literal, as well as metaphorical, journey from debilitating, treacherous India to green, healthy England: a journey that is beneficial, attractive and profoundly joyful, class and sexually non-threatening, as natural as the annual spring rebirth of the rose garden. The bitter irony of the fact that the garden is walled, locked, and at the mercy of its rich master(s) is not so noticeable at first sight. The intense *imperialism* of the fact that childhood in India – a double Other – is utterly demonized so that it could be conquered more easily – is equally likely to go unnoticed. ('Unnoticed', though, by no means implies 'ineffective'.)

'I'm your master when my father is away.
And you are to obey me. This is my garden.'
Colin Craven

The rhetoric that smoothly sets up one country (its culture, people, geography even) as diseased, and the other as its healthy opposite (with the never-questioned, never-even-mentioned belief that the healthy should rule the diseased), is only one manifestation of imperialist ideology/practice present in *The Secret Garden*. There are other traces, and other manifestations.

Imperialist practice is imbedded in the narrative structure of the novel itself, for instance. The plot in the first half is structured in such a way that Mary's return to health and proper English/ladylike ways is strikingly similar to colonial exploits. From the moment she hears the story of the locked garden (the forbidden territory), she is actively seeking it. When she finds the land, she claims it, though knowing right from the start it is not hers - at one point she even refers to the garden as her 'new kingdom' (84). Furthermore, her (physical, social, emotional) growing up might be interpreted in imperial terms: Mary is literally taking control of the Other – first the land, then her own body; in addition, she is mastering the foreign/indigenous language (Yorkshire dialect) - the procedure most obviously coming straight from her Indian experience: "And she tried to ask it in Yorkshire because that was his language, and *in India a native was always pleased if you knew his speech*". (112 (italics mine))

In the second half, the consequences of gender kick in²⁹, only seemingly paradoxically: we are still able to draw parallels with imperial practices – by initiating Colin into the secret of the garden, Mary learns the lesson of obedience, of sharing, of surrendering whatever power she might have. Her position, Kutzer argues, is now parallel to that of an Indian rajah who, though despot with his own people, is answerable to British colonial administrator, the Sahib. In other words, once Colin appears and starts taking his lawful position as the young master of the house, Mary (the representative of the 'lower' gender) is in turn, together with Dickon (the representative of the 'lower' class), conquered and colonized by his social, legal and considerable economic power. After all, though Mary does not understand it fully the moment she says it, a kingdom implies a king.

²⁹ Hardy would say, somewhat melodramatically, *The Woman Pays*.

Let us repeat: both empires have in common the subordination of the Other, but the Other, as Said wisely notices, is a shifting category. Mary's situation is paradoxical only on the surface: racial superiority combined with military, economic and cultural power makes her a miniature absolute monarch in India; in England, in the domestic empire, her power is significantly reduced - because she is not only English but also a girl, a young lady, a future angel in the house, who can be involved in the multifaceted, but essentially male imperial project indirectly, only through marriage.³⁰ Therefore Miss Lennox, together with the rest of the Misselthwaite Manor, succumbs to Colin's power. 'I am your master when my father is not here. You have to obey me. This is my garden.' (244). Colin is haughtily addressing his servant, the seventy-year-old Ben Weatherstaff here, but the words might equally be directed at Mary. (The truly alarming detail is that these arrogant words are uttered near the end of the novel, when Colin is, according to the narrator's comments, *cured* of his tantrums.) And if the words were directed at Mary, they would be equally accurate.

Mary's future role in England is early suggested in the portrait scene, when, rambling through the house (literally trying to discover her position within the domestic empire) she comes across the portraits of the Craven ancestors. Significantly enough, of all the people painted there is only one girl who resembles Mary, and this painted girl is stiff, ugly and further distinguished by an interesting detail: a green parrot - straight from the exotic Caribbean! - on her finger³¹. Mary is trying to find her place in the patriarchal tradition that obviously involves colonialism - for men (the Caribbean islands were colonized by England in the early 16th century) and posing - for women. Thus the options, for a young high-class girl, are not really impressive: a beautiful Mem Sahib in 'thin and floating' lacy dresses, an angel in the house³², and the living display of the wealth (and health) of the Empire(s). (The lower-class girl's options - Martha's for instance - are not impressive either: a servant in a rich master's house, a future Mrs. Madlock, whose duty is to fulfill every wish Mr Craven might have³³, or Susan Sowerby, clean and kind and inhumanly virtuous, as well as unbearably poor.)

In conclusion, 19th century British imperialism is in *The Secret Garden* naturalized, domesticated, replicated, explained, mystified, narrated, given 'human form divine', made familiar, acceptable, desirable; it is decidedly not questioned, analyzed or criticized –

³⁰ John Ruskin in his essay *Of Queen's Gardens* elaborates on this view of women and their *function*: "the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. (...) Her great function is Praise. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation."

Another example is from *Jane Eyre*: the famous scene in which St. John proposes to Jane – "Jane, come with me to India: come as my helpmeet and fellow-laborer." (1994: 397)

³¹ "There was a stiff, plain little girl rather like herself. She wore a green brocade dress and held a green parrot on her finger." (58)

³² Jane Eyre's rebellious way out of these stifling costumes is, sadly enough, masochism: "I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a thing than an angel." (281) The fact that the girl in the portrait is stiff (apart from enabling the link with Mary), additionally implies something that Burnett avoids to confront openly: the options offered turn women/girls into the living dead. On the other hand, if, as Eyre's case demonstrates, the only way out leads through/to masochism, the conclusion is frightening: women are trapped forever within omnipotent patriarchy, and there is no real running away.

³³ "She had not wanted to go to London just when her sister Maria's daughter was going to be married, but she had a comfortable, well paid place as housekeeper at Misselthwaite Manor and *the only way in which she could keep it was to do at once* what Mr. Archibald Craven told her to do. *She never dared even to ask a question.*" (19) (Italics mine)

with the exception of potential imperial flaws. Thus Burnett seems to agree with Conrad's Marlow who claims that 'what redeems [imperialist practice] is idea only.' For Burnett, the idea is all right.

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"INDIJA SE PRILIČNO RAZLIKUJE OD JORKŠIRA": IMPERIJ(E), ORIJENTALIZAM, I ROD U TAJNI NAPUŠTENOG VRTA BARNETOVE

Danijela Petković

Rad istražuje različite, povremeno iznenadjujuće veze između britanskog imperijalizma 19. veka i popularnog klasika za decu – romana Tajna napuštenog vrta Frensis Hod'son Barnet. Teza koja se dokazuje je da Barnetova ne samo prikazuje već i promovise imperijalizam i imperije. Imenica 'imperija' je namerno u množini: karakteristično za ovaj roman je to da pored britanske Imperije promovise i domaće, mini-imperije. Ovo služi da učvrsti i, kako bi Rolan Bart rekao, depolitizuje imperijalistički projekat – naročito u Indiji, koja je stalno u pozadini romana. Problemi roda prisutni u romanu će takodje biti istraženi i povezani sa širim kontekstom britanskog imperijalizma