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Bakalářská práce

The Portrayal of Gardens in British Children's Fiction

Vyobrazení zahrady v britské dětské literatuře

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Abstract

The subject of this bachelor thesis is the literary space of the enchanted garden in the novel *The Secret Garden* by the British author Frances Hodgson Burnett. The thesis will mention the context of modern British literature aimed at children's readers, and then focus on the importance and popularity of the space of the garden in children's literature of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, establishing the essential and supporting motifs that are connected to the theme of the literary space of the garden in early twentieth-century literature. Exploring the tradition of the British novel, this thesis will define the gothic motifs associated with the space of the house as opposed to the magical space of the garden. The thesis will include an analysis of the psychological development of the main characters and their coming of age in the isolated space of an English country mansion.

Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce je literární prostor kouzelné zahrady v díle britské autorky Frances Hodgson Burnettové *Tajemná zahrada*. Práce v úvodu zmíní kontext moderní britské literatury určené dětským čtenářům a dále se zaměří na důležitost a oblibu prostoru zahrady v dětské literatuře viktoriánského a edwardiánského období, přičemž stanoví podstatné a nosné motivy, které spojuje téma literárního prostoru zahrady v literatuře počátku 20. století. V rámci zkoumání tradice britského románu definuje gotické motivy spojené s prostorem domu jako protikladu k magickému prostoru zahrady. Součástí práce bude analýza psychologického rozvoje hlavních postav a jejich dospívání v izolovaném prostoru anglického venkovského sídla.

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1 Introduction

This bachelor thesis will deal with the topic of gardens and their portrayal in British children's literature, especially in the novel *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett from 1911. The main goal is a detailed analysis of the novel and description of its historical and cultural background. The theoretical part will focus on the history of children's literature from the period of Enlightenment until contemporary literary works, with the main area of research being the First Golden Age of Children's Literature when *The Secret Garden* was published. Subsequently, the themes of how the garden as a form of space is defined according to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, or what its functions are and symbols will be addressed, while distinguishing the outside and inside spaces in literature. The allegory of gardens will be compared to Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*. Lastly, the thesis will concentrate on the Victorian and Edwardian elements in *The Secret Garden* and study the opposite Romantic and Gothic elements, symbolizing the inside and outside spaces of the Yorkshire countryside.

The practical part of the thesis contains the interpretational analysis of *The Secret Garden*, with a detailed study of individual motifs. Firstly, the healing potential and transformative powers of the garden will be discussed, with the focus on the character development of multiple figures. The second chapter concentrates on the importance of a positive mindset and hope, which are two life aspects that the novel promotes. The following chapter deals with loneliness and the role of a parental figure in the novel, criticizes the upbringing during the Victorian Golden Age and shows how parental neglect influences children. Next, the idealization of the English countryside and its values, such as hard work, sacrifice and gratitude is discussed. The fifth chapter will concentrate on the motif of escapism, which can be seen in multiple characters and the secret garden itself. The penultimate chapter focuses on the frequent motif of magic and its parallels with religion, and the last chapter deals with colonialism and racism in the story, as its beginning takes place in India during the times when it was a British colony.

2 The history of the British children's literature

In the works from the period of Enlightenment, which can be dated from 1689 to 1760, children are usually portrayed as miniature adults and moral beings fully capable of rational thinking, who only follow the instructions of their parents or caregivers. The idea of children having their own, imaginative lives of any importance or the ability to perceive the world in a different way than grown-ups did not come until later, and there was scarcely the need to stimulate children's imagination in any way in the eighteenth century. Most of the material published in those times had the purpose of conveying some ethical message, such as the significance of hard work and how the unproductive and irresponsible individuals would face the threat of dying an unpleasant death and suffering an endless torment in hell. Only a few books managed to combine entertainment with moral lessons, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from 1719 or *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726 by Jonathan Swift.^{1 2}

The turning point came during the Romantic period, in 1789 with William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. Although those poems made no statement about the essence of the child's imagination or how it works, they implied that children's vision and perception of the world is incomprehensible to adults and it differs extensively. Another literary work that suggests that grown-ups do not possess the same instinctive understanding as children is William Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. This poem from 1804 deals with the idea that children are capable of higher spiritual consciousness compared to adults, because of their proximity to birth and therefore their pre-existence in heaven. This concept had already occurred in English poetry – the metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan expressed it in his poem *The Retreat* from the middle of the seventeenth century. It looks back nostalgically to “happy those early days, when I shined in my angel infancy” and describes the early childhood as a time when one “could see a glimpse of His bright face”, also implying that children spend some time with God before their birth. Growing up is described as putting a “fleshly dress” over the child's angelic innocence. The hint of Eden is evident in those poems, especially the similarity to the Genesis story where the earth appears as extraordinary and sacred to children as it did to Adam and Eve. Growing up becomes equal to the loss of Paradise. This could be connected to the Victorian and Edwardian authors of

¹ CARPENTER, Humphrey. *Secret Gardens – A Study of The Golden Age of Children's literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985, ISBN 0-395-35293-2

² MORKESOVÁ, Eliška. *An outline of the literature of Great Britain and the United States of America*. Ostrava: KORT, 1993

children's literature and their admiration for the imagery of a garden or enchanted places, in which shall everything be well and idealistic.³

During the High Victorian Period, which lasted from 1837 to 1875, the old idea of children being miniature, obedient versions of adults began to disappear and was replaced with a new theory, that children might simply be permitted to express themselves. The children's novel *Holiday House*, which was published in 1839 by the Scottish writer Catherine Sinclair, was the first work of fiction that approached children's disobedience with understanding and even praised it. The story revolves around the pranks of two little children and their cheerful, tolerant uncle, who derives joy from the buoyant nature of the children. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the different attitude towards children was portrayed in adult novels as well. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, both published in 1847 by the Brontë sisters, accepted that children possess an unclouded, even enhanced view of the world. They were even starting to be shown to be better than their parents.^{1 4}

The period from 1850 to the First World War is called the First Golden Age of Children's Literature. It began approximately with the publishing of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and ended with James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan* in 1911, although some sources state that it started with the above-mentioned Sinclair's novel *Holiday House* and ended later, in 1926, when Alan Alexander Milne published *Winnie the Pooh*. The child became an important figure in the English literary imagination and it stopped being portrayed as an undeveloped adult. The Golden Age authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Lewis Carroll or George MacDonald saw childhood as a life stage with multiple positive aspects that should be celebrated and explored, not suppressively discouraged.⁵

The uprise in children's literature was connected to the decline in child labour. In the early nineteenth century Britain, the average age that children started to work was ten years old, and it was even as low as eight years old in some regions. Most of these young workers worked either in factories or in mines under harsh conditions, performing dangerous jobs for long hours and very low pay. Many of the contemporary authors found the widespread employment of young children repulsive and they mirrored the disturbing situation in their works. For instance,

³ VAUGHAN, Henry. *The Retreat* [online]. [cit. 16.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45430/the-retreat-56d2250b6cff5>

⁴ STRÍBRNÝ, Zdeněk. *Dějiny anglické literatury (I)*. Praha: Academia – nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1987

⁵ SORBY, Angela. *Golden Age* [online]. [cit. 16.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://keywords.nyupress.org/childrens-literature/essay/golden-age/>

it inspired Elizabeth Barrett Browning to publish *The Cry of the Children* and Charles Dickens and his *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol* or *David Copperfield*. The last one mentioned was based on Dickens' own experience with child labour, starting to work at the age of twelve for the Warren's Blacking Factory. The campaign against child labour resulted in two crucial pieces of legislation – the Factory Act in 1833 and the Mines Act in 1842. They completely prohibited the employment of children younger than nine years old, restricted the working hours of the children between nine and thirteen years old and raised the starting age of the workers in mines to ten years. This led to the end of the systematic employment of young children, and towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign, further progress was achieved. The Factory Act of 1878 prohibited all kinds of work before the age of ten and was strengthened by the Education Act in 1880, which introduced mandatory schooling until the age of ten and created over one million new places at schools. Later, the school-leaving age was raised by additional amendments to twelve years. The pupils were allowed to leave earlier if they reached the required standards in reading, writing and arithmetic. This way, almost all children were in school until the age of twelve years by the end of Victoria's reign. To stop working meant to regain their childhood back and prolong it.⁶

In the First Golden Age, books for children began to be seen and required mainly for entertainment purposes and any didactic or moral intent was just additional. The children's literature was beginning to primarily target children and grew away from the adults. The direct narrative contact with the child was growing in popularity, rather than stories being interpreted by the adult perspective and mediated through their regulating minds. The period between 1860 and the beginning of the First World War brought many significant changes in society and politics. The Empire was at its peak, the position of women in society was starting to change and families were becoming smaller and more stable. Books became more affordable with the introduction of the *Hoe Cylinder Press* in the 1860s, and although colour printing had been possible since 1840s, the First Golden Age was the time when individual illustrators gained recognition.⁷

Although that multiple authors characterize the Golden Age texts as simple, peaceful and idealistic, they were considerably more complex and pragmatic than they might have initially seemed. Many pieces of literature established a misleading vision of Arcadian escape,

⁶ GRIFFIN, Emma. *Child labour* [online]. [cit. 16.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/child-labour>

⁷ HUNT, Peter. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, ISBN 0-19-219261-2

while weakening the fantasy world they have created by drawing attention to its problems. The texts' disunity, existential uncertainties and narrative experimentation reflected the changing perception of childhood in the modernist era and challenged the traditional narratives of childhood. Instead of offering an escape from contemporary worries, the Golden Age authors questioned its concept. Typical values portrayed and celebrated in the Golden Age literature were duty, self-sacrifice and gratitude, and all of these could be seen in *The Secret Garden's* character Dickon. Children are often shown to be running outside all day with no parental supervision, boys are portrayed as stronger and bolder than girls, and the literature works carry patriotic elements with the characters being proud of their country and social class. Children are expected to be resourceful and resilient and rather do than think. Some of the other examples from the First Golden Age would be *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, which is considered the first modern animal story, or the *Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, which inspired the Boy Scout movement.^{8 9}

The end of The First Golden Age of Children's Literature corresponds with the Edwardian era, which lasted only ten years from 1901 to 1910 and covered the brief reign of the King Edward the Seventh. It was a time of social turmoil with frequent workers' strikes, women fighting for their rights and agitation over the empire. *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, which this thesis will concentrate on, was published at the end of the Edwardian era in 1911.⁹

The Second Golden Age of Children's Literature can be dated from the 1950s to 1970s and it differs from the First Golden Age in multiple ways. Literary works from that period reflected the World Wars and the threat of nuclear attack, symbolized in the motif of the battle between good and bad, most famously in Tolkien. The genre of fantasy became popular and it usually portrayed a magical world threatened by some kind of danger. The child-adult relationship got more explored, including a broader range of parenting styles. In the Second Golden Age, the stories are more often told from the child's point of view, instead of the previous literary works told by authoritative narrators explaining the unsaid to the children readers. Literature opened new topics, that were previously considered taboo, such as divorce

⁸ ROVAN, Marcie Panutsos. (2016). *Happily Ever After? Ambiguous Closure in Modernist Children's Literature* (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/1125>

⁹ *The Golden Ages of Children's Literature* [online]. [cit. 17.4.2023 Retrieved from <https://www.slaphappylarry.com/the-difference-between-the-first-and-second-golden-ages-of-childrens-literature/>

or child abuse. Some of the authors who wrote in that time were Roald Dahl and his *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Dr. Seuss, the author of *The Cat in the Hat* or Eric Carle and his picture book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.^{9 10}

Currently, we are experiencing The Third Golden Age of Children's Literature. One of its characteristic attributes is the massive number of talented writers and quality literary works. The child's heroism lies in rebellion and there are new challenges for the characters to face and new topics discussed, such as ecology, politics or sexuality. The need for children's stories to have happy endings perished and some of them portray the cruel reality and deal with serious topics, such as mental health, self-harm, suicide and death. One of the most famous examples from the children's literature of previous years would be the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling.¹⁰

3 How is space defined, the function of space

According to Bachelard's phenomenological approach in *The Poetics of Space*, the "inside" of space is concrete, the "outside" is vast. Neither of those entities can exist without one another. Doors serve as a portal between those two worlds, separating the intimate, secure shelter of the inside, and the dreamy, spacious, fantasy world outside. All inhabited spaces carry the notion of home, as the outside symbolizes freedom and wilderness. The house protects and provides a safe place for dreams and memories, the outside offers an escape.¹¹

In Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, the dynamics between the mansion and the garden, therefore the inside and the outside, serves as one of the main motifs of the novel. The orphaned main protagonist, ten-year-old Mary lacks a sense of belonging somewhere. Even before her parents' death due to a cholera breakout, they neglected her and she never experienced parental love – instead, servants, who did not care about her wellbeing raised her. After Mary moves to England to start living at the Misselthwaite Manor with her uncle, the situation does not seem to improve. Mary's new home does not provide the comfort the child needs and fails her similarly to her parents in India – it does not feel like home at all. The manor is described as an enormous house with hundreds of locked rooms, that they forbade Mary to go in. The description awakes a sense of isolation, anxiety and even fear in readers, yet alone in the

¹⁰ CRAIG, Amanda. *Why this is a golden age for children's literature: 'Children's books are one of the most important forms of writing we have'* [online]. [cit. 17.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/why-this-is-a-golden-age-for-children-s-literature-children-s-books-are-one-of-the-most-important-forms-of-writing-we-have-10340568.html>

¹¹ BACHELARD, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, ISBN 0-8070-6439-4.

character of Mary. Her new caregiver, uncle Mister Craven is always absent and she is once again raised only by the housemaids.

The outside serves as an escape from Mary's new reality and the secret garden portrays a substitute for home – both physically and metaphorically. The space of the garden is situated inside four walls, just like a piece of the “inside” in the outside world. The secret garden becomes Mary's sanctuary, where she finally learns the feeling of belonging and gains a sense of purpose. Later, she starts taking her newly discovered friend and cousin, Dickon and Colin, into the garden and they all create their version of home, safe from the outside, adult world. By taking care of the garden, they learn to take care of themselves. The novel proposes the idea that by doing good, one becomes good.

“Where you tend a rose, my lad, a thistle cannot grow.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 355)

As a result of that, the secret garden becomes a place of recovery and transformation – both for the children and the garden itself. When Mary enters the secret garden for the first time, she finds it in an abandoned, neglected state, which symbolizes Mary herself. She realizes that there is still hope for rescuing and recovering the garden, similarly as there is hope for her own recovery.

“‘It isn't a quite dead garden,’ she cried out softly to herself. ‘Even if the roses are dead, there are other things alive.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 101)

In this statement, the roses ambiguously symbolize the beauty – her and the garden's, or actually its lack. Roses could also stand for health and vitality in this case. Mary comes to realization that although that beauty or health are absent at the moment, there is still a chance to retrieve them. It is possible to get rid of the weeds in the garden, similarly, as it is achievable to change her attitude, find friendship and heal from her traumas, she only needs to take care of it – as in to take care of herself and the garden and be consistent with it. More about Mary's and other characters' recovery is described in the practical part – 6.1 *The healing potential of the garden*.

The space of the secret garden is portrayed in contrast to the mansion and it mirrors the two, polar opposite worlds of children and adults. The house is under the constant supervision of the grown-ups, not allowing the children to fully be themselves and freely express themselves, whereas the garden serves as their safe haven, a place where children can play and feel at home. Inside, they are restricted from the rules and order, while the garden represents a

world of freedom. The dark, tapestried rooms are put to contrast with the lively garden and the wild moor.^{12 13}

"At first each day which passed by for Mary Lennox was exactly like the others. Every morning she awoke in her tapestried room and found Martha kneeling upon the hearth building tier fire; every morning she ate her breakfast in the nursery which had nothing amusing in it; and after each breakfast she gazed out of the window across to the huge moor which seemed to spread out on all sides and climb up to the sky, and after she had stared for a while she realized that if she did not go out she would have to stay in and do nothing - and so she went out." (Burnett, 1911, p. 55)

The extract above shows the contrast between the outside and inside spaces at the Misselthwaite Manor. The long days at the mansion felt mundane and repetitive to Mary, leaving her feeling bored, imprisoned, and dreaming of the world outside. Nature, especially the secret garden became her motivation to recover and stop wallowing in self-pity, similarly to Colin. The way that the secret garden is portrayed, it seems that everything is always perfect and idealistic in there, unlike on the moor in general. The moor nature is described as harsh, bleak and gloomy and Mary does not find it appealing at the beginning. The wind always seems to be blowing there and it plays a bigger role in the novel, to the point where it is sometimes personified.

"[...] when she began to walk quickly or even run along the paths and down the avenue, she was stirring her slow blood and making herself stronger by fighting with the wind which swept down from the moor." (Burnett, 1911, p. 55)

The wind represents Mary's struggle of accommodating to the Yorkshire climate – not only to the weather, but also to the inhabitants of the Misselthwaite Manor and her new life in the countryside. By fighting with the wind, or with nature in general, she also fought with herself and her past self, while growing into a new person. Martha also suggests that it was the wind who killed Mrs. Craven by knocking her down from a branch, which emphasizes how cruel and reckless the moor nature can be.

¹² JÍLKOVÁ, Klára. (2006). *Garden in children's literature - its presentation, role and symbolism in The Secret Garden and Tom's Midnight Garden* (Diploma thesis, Charles University). Retrieved from https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/8595/DPTX_2006_1_11410_OSZD001_68488_0_21655.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹³ WILKIE, Christine. "Digging Up The Secret Garden: Noble Innocents or Little Savages?," *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 28, No. 2 1997: 79

4 Symbols of space

Gardens can be assigned to multiple allegories, but the most prominent one has always been the allegory of paradise. Eden, which was the garden where according to Bible, Adam and Eve, God's offspring lived, and the secret garden in Burnett's novel, share some similarities. Firstly, both of them are portrayed as idealistic spaces, secluded from the rest of the world, offering an escape in form of tranquillity and beauty. Secondly, the parallel to the forbidden fruit is evident. In the Bible, Adam and Eve are forbidden to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, similarly as Mary is restricted from trying to enter the secret garden. Both of these regulations end up being violated. Those two gardens both serve as a symbol of transformation and renewal, whereas it is the children's recovery and the rescue of the dead plants in the secret garden, or Adam and Eve's lesson about good and evil that changed their understanding of the world and their relationship with God.

The allegory of paradise connected to gardens can be found in other pieces of children's literature, for instance in Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* from 1888. As the name suggests, the Giant symbolizes greed and selfishness. He possesses a garden that he built a wall around, to keep children out of it, similar to God banning Adam and Eve from Eden. When he realizes that together with the children, the joy and the spring weather disappeared, he decides to give them a second chance and let them back in the garden, showing an important Christian value – forgiveness. After he sees a small boy incapable of climbing a tree, he helps him and the boy embraces him, showing the Giant kindness. The Giant begins to feel fond of the boy, but then he does not see him for multiple years and the other children do not know who he was or where he disappeared. When he finally comes back, he is wounded with the prints of two nails on his hands and feet. The symbolism of Jesus' death and the following resurrection is evident. The Giant was furious and wanted to kill anyone who hurt the boy, but he just calmly responded that those are the wounds of love and he shall not be worried. With a smile, the boy told the Giant that since he let him play in his garden, he will now take him to his garden, which is paradise. Later that afternoon, the other children found the Giant dead under the tree, covered in white blossoms. As the Giant redeemed himself, he was accepted by Christ into heaven.¹⁴

¹⁴ WILDE, Oscar. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. London: Duckworth and Co., 1888

5 Victorian, Romantic and Gothic elements in *The Secret Garden*

As previously mentioned, the novel *The Secret Garden* was published in 1911, just at the end of the Edwardian Era, which began shortly after Victorian Era and lasted only for ten years. Therefore the story combines Victorian and Edwardian elements, but to emphasize the contrast between the two different spaces - the mansion and the garden, the author may have followed the previous literary tradition to incorporate some Romantic and Gothic elements as well.

The Victorian elements can be seen mainly in the way the story reflects the social and cultural hardships of the end of the nineteenth century. As the novel begins in India, readers can observe the cruel way in which the natives were treated by British people. Whereas the Victorian approach tends to celebrate and idealize colonialism, the Edwardian approach criticizes it and shows its problems. The story disapproves of the way Mary's privileged parents neglected her and instead, their role was taken over by servants. Perhaps to demonstrate how little of influence they had on their daughter's upbringing, Burnett portrayed Mary as indifferent towards her parents' death. The focus is on morality and education and Mary's positive transformation in the English countryside. The Victorian Era tended to romanticize children's innocence. In *The Secret Garden*, the romanticized, highly idealized character is Dickon and alternatively his mother. They portray the values of hard work, self-sacrifice, duty and gratitude, which Mary learns from them and later becomes Colin's mentor, teaching him those lessons as well.

The Romantic movement often emphasized children's close connection to nature. A famous representative of this statement was William Wordsworth, who described himself as a child of nature, someone who always wandered among mountains and lakes, referring to nature as his first and best teacher in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* from 1850. Later, other authors such as Mark Twain or Kenneth Grahame also portrayed children as being happiest while spending time freely running outdoors. One of the motifs symbolizing the child's close relationship to nature are animals, many times personified. In *The Secret Garden*, Mary grows a friendship with a robin bird, and Dickon is portrayed as an animal charmer who understands all animal species and knows how to communicate with them. All the passages admiring nature's beauty can be considered Romantic. Another Romantic element is the constant presence of magic. The sudden recovery of multiple characters, renewal of the secret garden, and transformation from worse to better can be all regarded as Romantic. Lastly, the story deals

with the theme of love and loss. The focus on the emotions and feelings of the individual characters and their following redemption also comes from Romanticism.^{15 16}

In contrast to the Romantic elements, the novel contains some Gothic elements as well, with one of the most prominent ones being the setting itself. The dark, gloomy mansion on the moor, isolated from the outside world, with hundreds of locked rooms and mysterious paintings, or the locked, almost imprisoned boy, kept in his room due to an alleged illness, with the portrait of his dead mother hidden behind a curtain – those are just some of the Gothic elements contributing to the uncanny atmosphere at the Misselthwaite Manor. The topic of death, loss and grief would be another one. Lastly, the emotional intensity in the novel could be considered a Gothic element, portrayed for instance by Colin's tantrums. The Gothic and Romantic elements, symbolized in the mansion and in the garden, perfectly contrast one another, strengthening the sense of need to escape into the garden.

¹⁵ BIXLER, Phyllis. *The Secret Garden - Nature's Magic*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996, ISBN 0-8057-8815-8.

¹⁶ BREEN, Jennifer; NOBLE, Mary. *Romantic Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2002, ISBN 0-340-809669-9

6 Interpretational analysis of *The Secret Garden*

6.1 The healing potential of the garden

If there is one thing that the novel *The Secret Garden* seems to promote, it is the importance of fresh air, movement, and the healing power of nature in general. This can be seen in multiple parts of the book, which describe how Mary or Colin changed - mentally and physically - owing to their hard work and the time spent outdoors. One could say that the process of tending the garden, weeding and nurturing the plants represents the healing itself. Through taking care of the garden, Mary takes care of herself as well. The exercise, hard work and regular dose of fresh air help her strengthen her immune system, and the consistency gives her purpose and motivation to leave the house every day. She also learns to be patient, appreciate the beauty of nature and enjoy the simple things in life.

“But the big breaths of rough fresh air blown over the heather filled her lungs with something which was good for her whole thin body and whipped some red color into her cheeks and brightened her dull eyes when she did not know anything about it. But after a few days spent almost entirely out of doors she wakened one morning knowing what it was to be hungry, and when she sat down to her breakfast she did not glance disdainfully at her porridge and push it away, but took up her spoon and began to eat it and went on eating it until her bowl was empty.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 56)

The extract above shows some of Mary’s character development. She underwent a complete change after arriving at the Yorkshire Misselthwaite Manor. After some time, Mary stopped taking everything and everyone for granted. In India, she never knew hunger, since she grew up in a wealthy family with servants, therefore she was not fond of the simple dishes they served her in Yorkshire at first. Progressively, as Mary spent more time outdoors, running and working in the secret garden every day, she began to appreciate the food and the workers. She no longer considered the housekeeper and housemaid her “servants”, instead, she treated them equally and was glad for their presence.

“Mary had seen herself in the glass sometimes lately when she had realized that she looked quite a different creature from the child she had seen when she arrived from India. This child looked nicer. Even Martha had seen a change in her. ‘Th’ air from th’ moor has done thee good already,’ she had said. ‘Tha’rt not nigh so yeller and tha’rt not nigh so scrawny. Even tha’ hair doesn’t slump down on tha’ head so flat. It’s got some life in it so as it sticks out a bit.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 190 - 191)

“The waxen tinge had left Colin's skin and a warm rose showed through it; his beautiful eyes were clear and the hollows under them and in his cheeks and temples had filled out. His once dark, heavy locks had begun to look as if they sprang healthily from his forehead and were soft and warm with life. His lips were fuller and of a normal color. In fact as an imitation of a boy who was a confirmed invalid he was a disgraceful sight.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 325)

The time spent outdoors in the Yorkshire air is presented in a healing way, suggesting that all Mary and Colin needed to get better was to go outside and experience hard, honest work. Simultaneously, as the children were recovering, so was the garden. They brought the dead, neglected plants to life, the garden started blooming and thriving and so did they – the complete transformation of the secret garden mirrors the change and growth in Mary's and Colin's lives.

“I used to wear an iron thing to keep my back straight, but a grand doctor came from London to see me and said it was stupid. He told them to take it off and keep me out in the fresh air.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 160)

Colin, who was believed to be invalid, started walking at the end of the novel, stating he owed to the secret garden and its magic. A boy who believed he would die suddenly found a reason to live.

But not only those two characters healed themselves in the nature. The secret garden helped Ben Weatherstaff and Colin's father as well – it brought them closure. Since Lillas (Colin's mother) died due to an injury that happened in the secret garden ten years ago, Archibald Craven (Colin's father) locked the garden and forbade everyone to go in it. The lives of both these men changed drastically after Lillas' death and they grieved in their own way. Mister Craven could not spend longer period of time in the Misselthwaite Manor as everything reminded him of his dead wife, including his new-born son, Colin. He was not able to look him in the eyes and ended up neglecting him, which led to the misery Colin suffered. Instead, he travelled the world as often as possible and let the housemaids take care of his son. He provided for him financially and checked on him occasionally, but he avoided Colin in general.

Ben Weatherstaff, the Misselthwaite Manor gardener, was a close friend of Lillas and her death changed him as well. He became taciturn and gloomy. Ben secretly continued to take care of the garden despite its lockdown by climbing the wall, as he knew Lillas was fond of it and that is what she would wish, until his rheumatics made him stop. It was his way of honouring her and coping with the loss, which also explains why he felt so protective of the secret garden and did not want Mary to find it at first.

At the end of the novel, Mister Craven has a dream of Lillas calling him back to the garden as he is traveling through Europe. He listens to his urge and immediately returns to the Misselthwaite Manor. The story finishes with his joyful reunion with Colin in the secret garden. Archibald barely recognizes his son, but his eyes resemble Lillas', as if she were in the garden herself. The plants come alive and so does the memory of Lillas. The secret garden no more needs to be kept secret, just like Colin in his room. He even uncovers the portrait of his mother that he used to hide behind a curtain.

"'Sometimes I don't like to see her looking at me. She smiles too much when I am ill and miserable. Besides, she is mine and I don't want every one to see her. [...] If she had lived I believe I should not have been ill always,' he grumbled. 'I dare say I should have lived, too. And my father would not have hated to look at me. I dare say I should have had a strong back. Draw the curtain again.'" (Burnett, 1911, p. 169)

"' [...] it doesn't make me angry any more to see her laughing. [...] She looked right down at me as if she were laughing because she was glad I was standing there. It made me like to look at her. I want to see her laughing like that all the time. I think she must have been a sort of Magic person perhaps.'" (Burnett, 1911, p. 337 – 338)

One of the possible interpretations of the mindset shift that Colin underwent is that tabooing difficult topics (such as death) only causes harm and misery. Once Colin stopped blaming his dead mother for his illness, actually left his room and tried to get better, he recovered. Once Mister Craven, Ben Weatherstaff and other inhabitants of the Misselthwaite Manor started to acknowledge the tragedy, unlocked the garden and spoke about Lillas again instead of pretending she never existed, she came alive in a way – just like the secret garden.

The garden served as a connecting place throughout the story – Mary bonded with Dickon over her discovered love for nature and gardening, but also over the secret they shared together. Progressively other characters were enlightened, such as Colin and Ben Weatherstaff. The secret garden brought closer two generations who had seemingly nothing in common. It also helped Mary to understand Mister Craven better – the man who appeared as detached, indifferent or even rude at first was in fact just broken and haunted by the death of his wife. As Mary learned the circumstances of the accident, she began to feel sympathy for Mister Craven and felt connected to him, since they both lost their family members. Finally, all five of these characters bond over their love for the garden, which really represents and honours Lillas, but also over the recovery of Mary, Colin and Mister Craven. Among other things, Mary overcomes

her state of bitterness and does not feel lonely anymore, she learns the value of friendship and hard work and begins to treat other people with respect. Colin overcomes his alleged disability and learns how to be more compassionate, and his father stops escaping from his problems – instead, he starts facing them and finally reunites with his son and niece. He no longer lives in the past. The novel concludes with multiple happy endings.

6.2 The importance of a positive mindset and hope

Not only nature played an important role in the recovery journey of several characters and the story itself – an optimistic outlook on life was mentioned countless times as well. Just listening to the stories about the secret garden helped Colin to heal faster – because in fact, it was hope that he felt. When he finally entered the secret garden for the first time, he found the motivation to recover and his own purpose.

“He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of color had actually crept all over him ivory face and neck and hands and all. ‘I shall get well! I shall get well!’ he cried out. ‘Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!’”
(Burnett, 1911, p. 266 - 267)

Once again, the motif of recovery and healing appears, this time in connection to optimism and a positive mindset. The entire character of Colin shows us how powerful can human thoughts be. His whole life he believed he was invalid – therefore he never left his bed and kept pitying himself. He needed someone to believe in him and give him hope – but since his mother died, his father avoided him and the housemaids at the Misselthwaite Manor just followed Mister Craven’s orders without deeply caring about Colin’s well-being, he never even thought about the possibility of recovery and a better life until Mary’s arrival.

“Don’t let us talk about dying; I don’t like it. Let us talk about living.”
(Burnett, 1911, p. 184 – 185)

Mary used her stories of the secret garden as a distraction – not only to distract Colin from his negative existential thoughts, but also to divert his attention from the secret and the mystery itself. At first, Colin does not know that Mary already entered the secret garden, so she only speaks about it hypothetically, since she is afraid that he would want to unlock the garden and therefore destroy the secret. She also protects him from the truth – Colin is unaware of the circumstances surrounding his mother’s death, so Dickon and Mary agreed that he shall not find out, otherwise it would worsen his health condition. The fact that Mary considers other’s

people feelings shows her personal growth – she changed from a selfish and self-centred person to an empathetic and helpful friend, who truly hoped that Colin would get better. Giving him something positive to concentrate on helped Colin to stop grieving and start planning a hopeful future instead. Mary never spoke about the possibility of dying in front of him, which lead Colin to forget about it as well.

“I was thinkin' that if he was out here he wouldn't be watchin' for lumps to grow on his back; he'd be watchin' for buds to break on th' rose-bushes, an' he'd likely be healthier,” explained Dickon.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 203)

Dickon got the idea to bring Colin into the secret garden, so he could distract him with the hard, rewarding work of gardening, weeding and nurturing the plants. He saw that it worked for Mary’s transformation and successfully supposed that it would help Colin as well.

As the end of the novel approaches, Colin lets Mary check his back, since he is convinced there is a lump that might cause his death, only for Mary to discover none. This find brings revelation that most of Colin’s fright and illness was created by himself – he believed that he would die as a hunchback, purely because his father is one. That catches his nurses by surprise – if they knew that Colin had such terrible thoughts, they would disprove them. This part of the story shows the readers the magnitude of friendship and family support. If Colin had someone to confide in, he would discover the truth earlier and it would impact his life in a significant way. Instead, he concealed his problems and did not talk to anyone about them, leading to his own misery. Once he shared his deepest fear, the fright of dying, with his cousin Mary, he felt relieved and hopeful. With her and Dickon’s help, he could recover.

“He had made himself believe that he was going to get well, which was really more than half the battle, if he had been aware of it.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 308)

The joy that Mary brought to Colin’s life was what healed him – the stories about the secret garden aroused his curiosity, and the mystery surrounding that space motivated him to leave his bed and experience the outside world. Seeing Mary and Dickon working and playing in the garden gave him the motivation to get stronger and therefore recover, so he could join them. But it also taught him patience, as he saw that healing is a long journey that does not happen overnight. While working on his recovery, he spent time with his new friends, Mary and Dickon, and together they shared multiple joyful moments laughing over Colin’s books, their stories and the secret children shared together.

“The glummiest, ill-natured little thing she used to be and now her and Master Colin laugh together like a pair of crazy young ones. Perhaps they're growing fat on that.” ‘Perhaps they are,’ said Dr. Craven. ‘Let them laugh.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 327)

“Th' more they laugh th' better for 'em!” said Mrs. Sowerby, still laughing herself. ‘Good healthy child laughin's better than pills any day o' th' year. That pair'll plump up for sure.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 314)

Another example of the importance of a positive mindset is the character of Ben Weatherstaff, who in fact mirrors Mary's personality. He is the first person who does not treat her with respect – sometimes he curses at her or behaves rudely, whereas other times she enjoys his companion, and they talk about the garden and nature with joy. Thanks to Ben, Mary realizes what difference can positive attitude and being kind to other people make, and how such a simple thing as a smile can change your perception of someone.

“To her surprise the surly old weather-beaten face actually changed its expression. A slow smile spread over it and the gardener looked quite different. It made her think that it was curious how much nicer a person looked when he smiled. She had not thought of it before.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 47)

As a result of this experience, Mary also starts reflecting on her own behaviour. Even Ben points out the fact that they share some similarities, and as the story progresses, Mary notices that Colin tallies with those as well. At first, Mary gets offended, but that only leads to her journey of character development. When Ben draws attention to the truth that they both are ill-tempered, irritable and lonely, it makes her feel uncomfortable and for the first time in her life, she begins to consider how she appears to other people. Realizing how disagreeable Ben seems to her sometimes concludes in Mary rethinking her habits and trying to treat other people kinder.

Another moment which makes Mary reconsider her past actions is seeing how Colin treats the employees at the Misselthwaite Manor. The fact that she can recognize how impolite Colin is and how she feels bad for the employees shows her character growth. Mary even becomes somewhat like his mentor, when she reproaches him for his behaviour and tells him that she used to be like him as well, but she changed and that made her life quality better. Colin respects her and therefore listens to her advice – he sees that positive thinking and kind behaviour are some personality aspects that Dickon and the healthy version of Mary possess, which motivates him, as he also wants to recover.

To conclude this chapter, optimism, hope, kindness and patience are important motifs in the novel. All these character traits helped multiple characters heal themselves and they brought a moral aspect to the story.

“Thoughts are as powerful as electric batteries as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it , as long as you live.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 353)

6.3 Loneliness and the role of a parental figure

The sense of loneliness and isolation play a significant role in the novel and most of the plot is based on those motifs. At the beginning of the story, readers learn that Mary is neglected by her parents – her father is always busy working under the English Government, and her mother seems to be a superficial, non-motherly woman who does not hide the fact that she did not want any children and prefers partying over spending time with her only daughter. As a result of that, Mary is raised by servants in India who only follow the orders of her mother – which mainly means to keep Mary out of her mother’s sight. Those circumstances lead to Mary being spoiled, always getting what she wants and not learning how to respect authorities. When both of her parents die due to a cholera breakout, Mary reacts in an emotionless manner and does not seem affected at first, even after all of her surviving servants forget about her and leave her.

“Mary had liked to look at her mother from a distance and she had thought her very pretty, but as she knew very little of her she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to miss her very much when she was gone. She did not miss her at all, in fact, and as she was a self-absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 10)

“‘Perhaps if her mother had carried her pretty face and her pretty manners oftener into the nursery Mary might have learned some pretty ways too. It is very sad, now the poor beautiful thing is gone, to remember that many people never even knew that she had a child at all.’ ‘I believe she scarcely ever looked at her,’ sighed Mrs. Crawford.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 13 – 14)

Mary’s mother was always admired for her beauty and it is presented as her most memorable feature, even by her own daughter. However, her vanity, self-absorbedness and lack of motherly love caused Mary to be self-centred as well. She got accustomed to the fact that

she always got what she wanted from her servants, and everyone obeyed her, which she took for granted and treated the employees with disrespect at such a young age. After her parents' death, Mary realizes she feels lonely and neglected and does not understand why she never felt connected to her parents. She even notices that she does not know how to establish a connection with other people or make friends among her peers.

At first, Mary stays at English Clergyman's house and feels uncomfortable in the presence of his five poor children – she judges their untidy bungalow and worn clothes. This is her first time experiencing poverty. Instead of feeling grateful for the kind act of the Crawford family accommodating her and trying to help her recover after the tragedy, Mary feels resentful of them and hopes to leave as soon as possible. She does not know how to react when the Crawfords try to be affectionate towards her – Mary never experienced parental love and therefore it unsettles her.

“They tried to be kind to her, but she only turned her face away when Mrs. Crawford attempted to kiss her, and held herself stiffly when Mr. Crawford patted her shoulder.”
(Burnett, 1911, p. 13)

After she is sent to live at the Misselthwaite Manor, which belongs to her uncle (Mary's father was the brother of Lillas), Mary comes to terms with the fact that she is lonely and seems to have given up on enjoying her life and building meaningful connections.

“‘People never like me and I never like people,’ she thought.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 46)

The first exception that she encounters is a red-breasted robin – a little bird, which she sometimes meets in the gardens. To her surprise, it brings her joy. His chirping and singing make Mary feel that he is doing it for her and thanks to the robin, she learns to appreciate the simple things in life and to admire nature. When she discovers that the robin was left by the rest of his brood, she suddenly feels connected to him – both of them are orphans. The robin therefore serves as a symbol of connection and understanding, not only between Mary and the bird itself, but also between Mary and Ben Weatherstaff, another lonely character who considers the robin his only friend. Since Mary and Ben both share their love for the robin, they have something in common and it is the building stone for their friendship. Seeing how the friendliness of the bird positively affects Mary makes her realize that she is able of connecting to others and that there is hope for her, just like for the bird. But the robin plays another significant role in the story – he is the one who leads Mary to the secret garden, respectively to its key, and therefore the first one to share the secret with her. The robin serves as Mary's

mentor in this case – the friendly bird and the mystery surrounding the secret garden are the only factors that convinced Mary to spend time outside on the moor, which later lead to her recovery. She treats the robin as if he were a real person and speaks to him in an affectionate manner. Owing to him, Mary discovers Ben's soft and sensitive side, without realizing that she also has one.

Another character dealing with loneliness is Mary's cousin, Colin. Their stories share multiple similarities, with the most significant one being the absence of a parental figure in their lives. Colin's mother died around the time when he was born, and his father avoids him ever since, as he reminds him of his dead wife and the heartbreak he experienced. As a result of that, Mister Craven is very absent in his son's life and he prefers to travel to escape the painful reality. Similar to Mary, Colin is also raised mainly by the housemaids and nurses, and as both Mary and Colin come from wealthy families, other common features that the two cousins share are spoiledness, ingratitude, disagreeable behaviour and impoliteness. Colin's father is a hunchback, which means he has a crooked back – not in a significant way, yet Colin assumes he must be one too, since they are related and he heard other people talking about it. What he does not know is that the employees and others around him also only suppose he will become invalid in the future, and therefore treat him as if he were one. His lifelong misery comes from believing rumours he accidentally overheard. Colin's caregivers do not seem to realize that the factor that is worsening his health condition is not any kind of disability, but his isolation from the outside world. He fears dying and prefers to hide in his room and lay in bed all day, does not want to see anyone and many people are unaware of the fact that Mister Craven has a son. When Mary arrives at the Misselthwaite Manor, Colin's existence is kept secret from her, until she hears him crying in the middle of the night, soothes him and they progressively become friends. Owing to her, Colin, who was on the verge of depression discovers that all this time he feared death irrationally and he behaved like a hypochondriac. His weak back and inability to stand up did not come from any body impairment, but from the lack of movement in his life. The housemaids obeyed his wish not to be interrupted and stay in the bed most of the time because his father is the owner of the mansion, and that could lead to the possibility of Colin inheriting it and being in charge of everything one day. Another character who is aware of this fact is Mister Craven's brother, Colin's poor uncle, who works as his personal doctor. On one hand, he knows that if Colin does not recover and possibly dies, he would be the second person in order of inheritance – on the other hand, the narrator specifically says that he is not an unscrupulous or unethical man and he ultimately cares for his nephew's well-being. The

solitude, parental neglect and fear of dying are major emotional burdens that a ten-year-old child should not deal with. Additionally, Colin is abandoned by both of his parents – involuntarily by his mother, but it was his father’s conscious choice not to be involved in his son’s life, respectively only from afar by financially supporting him and spoiling him. Yet all Colin needed was a different kind of support – the emotional one - and parental guidance. The awareness that his father voluntarily pretends he has no son and constantly leaves him to travel the world instead of spending Colin’s childhood years with him is what only deepens his pain. Furthermore, the memory of his mother was tainted by Colin’s feeling of guilt. He blamed her death for the fact that his own father hates him, at least that is what he thought. He knew that his father could not bear to look at him, since the resemblance between Colin and his mother was undeniable, but Colin misunderstood it as hatred from his father’s side. If his father was present in Colin’s life, it would be wholly different – he would not isolate himself from the outside world and wallow in self-pity, he would be healthy and presumably unspoiled.

Given these points, the motif of loneliness caused by parental neglect plays a significant role in the novel and leads to escapism and seeking out sanctuary, which is found in nature and later in the secret garden. As the story progresses, Mary observes that the robin has found a mate and they are building a nest together. This could be seen as a parallel to Mary and Dickon (and later Colin) working and tending the secret garden, and also building a safe space substituting home for them. All three of them – Mary, Colin and the robin – overcame loneliness and found their acquaintances.

6.4 The idealization of English countryside and its values

On the contrary to Mary’s and Colin’s dysfunctional family, the story strongly idealizes Dickon’s family, especially his mother. She raised twelve children (including Martha – a housemaid at the Misselthwaite Manor), they are facing financial insecurity, live in four small rooms in a cottage on the moor and never have enough to eat. Martha’s stories of her family catch Mary’s interest, as they represent the polar opposite of what she was used to in India and in her own family. They all share a strong bond and help one another. Martha gives all of her wages to her mother and spends her leisure time at the cottage helping with house chores and taking care of the younger siblings. Compared to Mary’s and Colin’s families, the novel suggests that money cannot buy happiness. Both Mary and Colin come from wealthy families which have resources for traveling the world, owning mansions with numerous servants and indulging in interesting hobbies. Both of them are spoiled and never lacked materially, yet the parental absence in their lives brought them misery. On the contrary, Dickon’s family is loving

and close-knit, owing to the challenges they face. This part of the novel indicates that social class and money are not the only factors that determine happiness and that there are more important aspects to life. Instead, real luck and happiness come from genuine connections and appreciating the simple things that life has to offer. Mary is in awe of how generous the Sowerby family is – although they barely have enough food to feed all fourteen people, they are concerned about her and want to help Mary get better, and even with the little money they have, they are able to buy a present for her. She gets a skipping rope from them, as Dickon's mother believes it is what children need – movement in the fresh air and to spend time outside, which shows readers that she understood children better than the doctors that took care of Colin, since it really helped both of them recover. This is another part of the story which expresses Mary's character development. She has learned to be grateful and to appreciate the things that other people do for her. Her perception of the Sowerby family contrasts her stay with the poor English Clergyman's house at the beginning of the novel. Previously, she judged poor people and felt uncomfortable in their presence. At the end of the novel, she has developed a deeper understanding of them, admires their strength and even aspires to resemble them more.

Dickon's mother, Susan Sowerby, is presented as a motherly, nurturing figure, but also a hard-working woman living a simple – yet not easy - life in the countryside. She is practically oriented, down to earth and wise, and multiple characters come to her for advice. Mrs. Sowerby is admired and idealized not only by the children, but also by the adult protagonists, such as Mrs. Medlock or Mister Craven. Everyone in the novel seems to be fond of her, but also of her son Dickon. The glorification of Mrs. Sowerby is expressed through the fact that she is always right and has a solution for everything, everyone knows her and praises her – the same could be said about Dickon.

“‘ [...] *I'd always take Susan Sowerby's advice about children myself. She's what you might call healthy-minded if you understand*’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 150)

“‘*Eh! mother!*’ said Dickon admiringly, ‘*what a wonder tha' art! Tha' always sees a way out o' things*’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 135)

“*She was quite right, the comfortable wonderful mother creature [...]*” (Burnett, 1911, p. 316)

The word comfortable is frequently mentioned in connection to Dickon's mother, as it is how most characters feel in her presence. The parentless children find comfort and security

in her, for others, she is the source of wisdom and resilience. The use of the phrase “creature” suggests that she is almost supernatural or ethereal.

“‘What a wonderful thing for Mrs. Sowerby to think of! What a kind, clever woman she must be! [...] Magic is in her just as it is in Dickon,’ said Colin. ‘It makes her think of ways to do things nice things. She is a Magic person. Tell her we are grateful, Dickon, extremely grateful.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 320 - 321)

“‘She’s the best sick nurse I know,’ said Dr. Craven. ‘When I find her in a cottage I know the chances are that I shall save my patient.’ Mrs. Medlock smiled. She was fond of Susan Sowerby.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 244)

Despite the fact that Colin and Mary were both emotionally wounded by their parents’ neglect, the stories of Dickon’s mother amazed them and she immediately gained their trust. Those stories helped them get through the lonely times and progressively, both of them wanted to meet Martha’s and Dickon’s mother in person.

“Mary always wanted to hear about mother.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 201)

Mrs. Sowerby is mostly called “mother” throughout the story, since that is what Dickon and Martha call her, but it also symbolizes that she is such a motherly figure, that she is a mother to everyone - even Mary calls her “mother” when talking about her. Mrs. Sowerby represents motherhood itself and parental love.

“[...] it was not long before it was agreed between the two children that Dickon’s mother might ‘come into the secret.’ Somehow it was not doubted that she was ‘safe for sure.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 311)

When the children finally meet Susan Sowerby, they are speechless. Everything that Dickon’s mother does is described as motherly, everyone feels secure and comfortable around her. She is like a second mother to Mary and Colin. They never experienced motherly love – Colin’s mother died around the time when he was born and Mary’s mother was too self-absorbed to care about her daughter. Now, Mrs. Sowerby is like the mother they never had to them. Despite her busy schedule and the fact that she has her own twelve children, she genuinely cares about the well-being of Mary and Colin.

“Colin held out his hand with a sort of flushed royal shyness but his eyes quite devoured her face. ‘Even when I was ill I wanted to see you,’ he said, ‘you and Dickon and the secret garden. I’d never wanted to see any one or anything before.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 346)

“Colin walked on one side of her and Mary on the other. Each of them kept looking up at her comfortable rosy face, secretly curious about the delightful feeling she gave them a sort of warm, supported feeling. It seemed as if she understood them as Dickon understood his ‘creatures.’ She stooped over the flowers and talked about them as if they were children.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 348 – 349)

Even the way she approaches plants is motherly, and the children are in awe of her, silently admiring her and patiently waiting for her upcoming wise words.

“‘You are just what I what I wanted,’ he said. ‘I wish you were my mother as well as Dickon’s!’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 352)

As previously mentioned, another highly idealized character is Susanne Sowerby’s son, Dickon. He is often described as an animal charmer, since he allegedly knows how to communicate with animals, and spends most of his time taking care of them and talking to them. In general, he possesses deep knowledge of the natural world and seems to know everything about plants and living creatures. His most dominant personal qualities are gentleness, kindness and innocence. Throughout the novel it is suggested that he is the most knowledgeable person about natural phenomena, surpassing even his own mother. In spite of being just twelve years old, he is the one who mostly provides food for his family.

“‘We’d never get on as comfortable as we do,’ Mrs. Sowerby said, ‘if it wasn’t for Dickon’s garden. Anything ’ grow for him. His ’taters and cabbages is twice th’ size of any one else’s an’ they’ve got a flavor with ’em as nobody’s has.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 310)

“‘Our Dickon can make a flower grow out of a brick walk. Mother says he just whispers things out o’ th’ ground.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 103)

Similarly to Susan Sowerby, everyone on the moor knows and adores Dickon, and even the grown-ups respect him and appreciate his knowledge.

“‘It’s Dickon,’ Mary spoke up suddenly. She felt somehow that everybody who knew the moor must know Dickon. And she was right, too. She saw that in a moment Dr. Craven’s serious face relaxed into a relieved smile. ‘Oh, Dickon,’ he said. ‘If it is Dickon you will be safe enough. He’s as strong as a moor pony, is Dickon.’ ‘And he’s trusty,’ said Mary. ‘He’s th’ trustiest lad i’ Yorkshire.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 242)

The connection between Dickon and nature is so strong, that the animals in the story consider Dickon one of their own, and even Dicken himself stresses the similarities between humans and animals multiple times.

“‘Sometimes I think p'raps I'm a bird, or a fox, or a rabbit, or a squirrel, or even a beetle, an' I don't know it.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 124)

“At first the robin watched Mary and Colin with sharp anxiety. For some mysterious reason he knew he need not watch Dickon. The first moment he set his dew-bright black eye on Dickon he knew he was not a stranger but a sort of robin without beak or feathers.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 329)

Dickon plays an important role in the story and especially in Mary's and Colin's recovery. When Mary first hears Martha's stories about this animal charmer who knows everything about nature, she is impressed beyond measure. The difference between the flora, and especially the fauna in England and India catches Mary's interest, and she hopes that she can meet Dickon in person, so he can share some of his knowledge with her. Dickon becomes her motivation to explore the moor and the outdoors in general, in the same way as for Colin later in the story.

“It was really this mention of Dickon which made Mary decide to go out, though she was not aware of it.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 41)

Dickon becomes Mary's and Colin's mentor, passing on the knowledge from his mother to them. He teaches them how rewarding hard work is and how it can bring positive change and healing – not only to the garden, but also to their lives. Dickon is one of the characters that motivated Mary to change her attitude and owing to him, she can reflect on her previous behaviour and share this important lesson with Colin, overtaking Dickon's role of mentor.

The difference in their class and social status is shown through the accents and spelling. The ordinary people from the moor, such as Dickon, Martha or their mother speak with a strong Yorkshire accent, which can be challenging to understand for the reader, or even Mary at the beginning of the story.

“‘Canna' tha' dress thyssen!’ she said. ‘What do you mean? I don't understand your language,’ said Mary. ‘Eh! I forgot,’ Martha said. ‘Mrs. Medlock told me I'd have to be careful or you wouldn't know what I was sayin’.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 33)

At first, Mary finds the accent irritating and feels frustrated at the fact that she does not understand it, but as the story progresses and her admiration for Dickon grows, she tries to learn Yorkshire herself. This part of the novel illustrates how the differences between the poor, village boy and privileged Mary and Colin progressively disappeared, as the garden and the secret surrounding it brought them closer. In the same way that Mary adapts her speech so Dickon can understand her, so does Dickon adjust the way he speaks to Mary. Their friendship overcame the social construct of class.

“Underneath were the printed letters and they said: ‘I will cum back’”
(Burnett, 1911, p. 152)

Dickon’s poverty is also shown through his spelling – he barely knows how to write, as he comes from a financially struggling family of fourteen people, and it is mentioned that even his older sister Martha was not taught how to write, whereas Mary and Colin had the privilege of governesses who taught them how to read and print letters.

The character of Dickon and his mother are strongly idealized and represent a happy, functional family, which contrasts the dysfunctional families of Mary and Colin. The Sowerby family shows the readers that money is not as important as the bond and love that they share, and that hard work, humbleness, modesty and gratitude can bring true happiness even in difficult times. Another lesson to be learnt from them is that the key to contentment is appreciating the simple things and being in touch with nature. The novel suggests that Dickon and his mother are almost ethereal, by calling his mother “creature” and comparing Dickon to an angel.

“There really was a sort of Magic about Dickon, as Mary always privately believed.”
(Burnett, 1911, p. 258)

“[...] his nose does turn up and he has a big mouth and his clothes have patches all over them and he talks broad Yorkshire, but - but if an angel did come to Yorkshire and live on the moor - if there was a Yorkshire angel - I believe he’d understand the green things and know how to make them grow and he would know how to talk to the wild creatures as Dickon does and they’d know he was friends for sure.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 236)

6.5 Escapism

The motif of escapism and running away from reality keeps reoccurring in the novel through multiple characters. The first character by whom this phenomenon might be seen is the

most obvious one – Mary. She grows up as an unhappy child neglected by her parents. Even before moving to the Misselthwaite Manor in England, where the secret garden is, the motif of escapism, specifically escapism to the garden appears. It holds no significance that the gardens in India are completely different from the ones in Yorkshire and from Mary's beloved secret garden. The important part is the act of escapism itself – everyone, and especially children need a safe space. Mary, as a child, could not recognize why she felt miserable most of the time. She was not aware of the fact that it was her parents' love that she lacked and therefore her home could not be a safe space for her. The act of escaping into the garden was in fact escaping into the fantasy world as well, which helped Mary to forget about her current struggles.

“She was actually left alone as the morning went on, and at last she wandered out into the garden and began to play by herself under a tree near the veranda. She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms into little heaps of earth, all the time growing more and more angry and muttering to herself the things she would say and the names she would call Saidie when she returned.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 3)

In this case, playing by herself also helped Mary regulate her anger and turn her aggressive thoughts into creative ones. This image foreshadowed Mary's future in Yorkshire, her sanctuary in the secret garden and even her new-discovered love for gardening and nature. When she arrived at the Misselthwaite Manor, the secret garden was her hideout from the lonely, empty mansion and the boredom that it represented for a child. The wandering in the moor, exploring the secret garden, nurturing the plants and watching their growth helped Mary forget about her problematic past and start concentrating on a hopeful future instead. She found a new hobby, something to look forward to every day and the feeling of fulfilment owing to the garden. It became her place of comfort and the garden itself was also idealized – everything always seemed to be perfect in there.

Colin's storyline follows a similar direction – when he finally enters the secret garden, he starts believing in himself and his ability to recover. It helps him to escape the prejudices of the inhabitants of the Misselthwaite Manor – in the garden, he is no longer an invalid, no longer a child on the verge of dying. He is a young, healthy boy, running in the countryside with his friends. Similarly to Mary, the garden helps him forget about the troubled relationship he has with his father.

Nevertheless, the motif of escapism concerns the father himself as well. Ever since his wife died ten years ago, he became detached, uncommunicative and gloomy. Instead of facing

his challenges, such as the heartbreak of losing a loved one and raising a child on his own, he decided to avoid them and travel the world instead. He was rarely seen at the Misselthwaite Manor, as it reminded him of the tragedy and he could not bear to look his son in the eyes. Not only that it brought back the memories of the deceased Lilies, but it also reminded Mister Craven of the fact that he failed as a parent and disappointed his own son. As the end of the novel approaches, Archibald Craven comes to the realization that he cannot escape his past by distracting himself with work and traveling. He is haunted by the memories of his wife calling him back to the garden. The joyful reunion of the father and the son at the end symbolizes that one can never solve their problems by escaping them, instead, one must face them.

Another character that resorts to escapism as the solution to their problems is Ben Weatherstaff, the head gardener at the Misselthwaite Manor. The motif of escapism is not that evident in his character, yet it is still implied. He spent most of his life alone, working in the gardens, and the loss of Lilies Craven negatively affected him as well. In his case, the hard work serves as an escape from his negative thoughts and the harsh reality, that he has no one to spend his life with. Progressively, he starts seeing similarities between himself and Mary and they form a friendship. Their love for the garden and nature in general is what helps them connect and as the story progresses, readers learn that his negative attitude and detachment from others are only his coping mechanisms. Ben Weatherstaff's character represents the idea that one shall not judge others based on their first impression and that it is impossible to fully understand what challenges is one dealing with without properly communicating and offering to listen to them.

In conclusion, the motif of escapism can be found in multiple forms in the novel. Whether it is through playing and imagination, work addiction, or the physical act of escaping itself - for instance into the garden or traveling as far as possible - escapism plays a significant role in the novel. The author suggests that avoiding our problems is a negative phenomenon and all of the characters progressively come to this conclusion as well. Once they start confronting their difficulties, they allow themselves to let go of their past and heal.

6.6 The motif of magic and parallels with religion

The word "magic" appears more than one hundred times in the novel and it is also the name of one of the chapters, suggesting that it plays a vital role in the story. There are multiple interpretations of the presence of magic in the novel.

"'It was Magic which sent the robin,' said Mary secretly to Dickon afterward. 'I know it was Magic.'" (Burnett, 1911, p. 273)

The fact that the word "Magic" is almost always spelled with a capital initial letter indicates that it is not magic in general what is meant, but rather something concrete. Unlike other metaphors, the meaning of magic is never explicitly explained in the novel and it stays up to the readers' imagination and their own interpretation of how they understand it.

One of the options that could be hidden behind the word "Magic" is nature and its powers. As the children get to the secret garden, they are utterly amazed – ever since that, the novel contains multiple extracts describing nature and praising its beauty, especially in the springtime. Their admiration of the secret garden and the Yorkshire nature convinces them that there is something magnificent and extraordinary about it, which according to the children means there has to be magic involved.

"They always called it Magic and indeed it seemed like it in the months that followed - the wonderful months - the radiant months - the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden! If you have never had a garden, you cannot understand, and if you have had a garden you will know that it would take a whole book to describe all that came to pass there. At first it seemed that green things would never cease pushing their way through the earth, in the grass, in the beds, even in the crevices of the walls. Then the green things began to show buds and the buds began to unfurl and show color [...]" (Burnett, 1911, p. 295)

Mary and Colin see nature and its processes as something magical and exceptional. The simple act of the seasons and weather changing astonishes them, similarly to the plants growing and changing colours. This might be explained by the fact that both of these children spent most of their lives inside, whether it was due to their parents' neglect or an alleged disability. Dickon thinks more realistically, as he grew up on the moor and is used to the outdoors. He does not see only the beauty of nature, but also the hard work behind it, since he regularly tends the garden to provide food for his family. Nevertheless, his admiration for nature is as strong as Mary's and Colin's, and he never forgets to appreciate it and feel grateful for it.

"'It's same Magic as made these 'ere work out o' th' earth,' and he touched with his thick boot a clump of crocuses in the grass. Colin looked down at them. 'Aye,' he said slowly, 'there couldna' be bigger Magic then that there - there couldna' be.'" (Burnett, 1911, p. 284 – 285)

In addition to the concept of nature, the process of healing is often mentioned in connection to magic, whether it is the recovery of Mary, Colin or Ben Weatherstaff. The act of change and transformation is symbolized by the secret garden itself – it seemingly cured multiple characters. In reality, the “magic” in this case would be the exercise and regular stay in the fresh air. Similarly to taking care of the garden, the children learn that taking care of themselves also requires consistency, to keep the “magic” alive.

“She felt that his Magic was working all the afternoon and making Colin look like an entirely different boy. It did not seem possible that he could be the crazy creature who had screamed and beaten and bitten his pillow. Even his ivory whiteness seemed to change.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 274)

“The Magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 300)

Another aspect needed for the “magic” to function is the previously mentioned positive mindset. Mary, Colin and Dickon observed that once they started believing in the possibility of recovery, they turned it into reality. What would grown-ups call determination or strong will, children considered magic.

“When I was going to try to stand that first time Mary kept saying to herself as fast as she could, ‘You can do it! You can do it!’ and I did. I had to try myself at the same time, of course, but her Magic helped me and so did Dickon’s.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 301)

In the case of the extract above, the “magic” was the fact that someone believed in Colin for the first time in his life. The new-found concept of friendship and hope seemed so remarkable to him, that he also regarded it as magic. As in the previous examples, this one suggests that the innocence of children allows them to see simple, ordinary things as magical and supernatural. Without realizing it, they appreciate the little things and inconspicuous details of life which the grown-ups would not notice, or at least would not take the time of their day to appreciate them and feel grateful for them. This contrast between the children’s world of fantasy and the rational grown-up world can be seen in the novel, especially when concentrating on the character of Ben Weatherstaff.

“I heard every bit of it. You said th’ Magic was in my back. Th’ doctor calls it rheumatics.” (Burnett, 1911, p. 306)

After establishing a friendship with the children and bonding over the secret garden, the reader can observe the differences between the way Ben Weatherstaff and the children approach magic. Mary and Colin take it very seriously, whereas Ben finds it ridiculous and only joins the children out of his respect for Mister Craven, who is the father of Colin, which means Colin could potentially inherit the Misselthwaite Manor one day and become Ben's superior.

"The sun is shining - the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing - the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is the Magic - being strong is the Magic. The Magic is in me - the Magic is in me. It is in me - it is in me. It's in every one of us."
(Burnett, 1911, p. 305)

Whilst the children saw magic in everyday, mundane aspects of life, Ben Weatherstaff could not see the world through their eyes. His rational, work-oriented mindset did not allow him to give in to fantasy and join the children in their games, symbolizing the age gap between them and one of the hardships of intergenerational friendship.

"I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us like electricity and horses and steam.' This sounded so imposing that Ben Weatherstaff became quite excited and really could not keep still."
(Burnett, 1911, p. 299)

The extract above shows the moment when Colin decided to "scientifically experiment with magic" and make discoveries about it. Even Ben Weatherstaff stopped being serious for a while and let the children's fantasy influence him, allowing himself to escape from his everyday responsibilities and negative thoughts, maybe revisiting his own childhood in his mind. It surprisingly brought him joy, and although it was mainly caused by Colin's unexpected recovery, it also shows the readers how finding the beauty in the small, everyday things can positively influence one's attitude.

Lastly, the magic in the novel shares some apparent parallels with religion. The way children talk about it suggests that magic to them represents something that one must believe in and take care of it so it can thrive.

"Mary had thought he meant something about Magic. She was a great believer in Magic." (Burnett, 1911, p. 274)

"And each day his belief in the Magic grew stronger as well it might."
(Burnett, 1911, p. 322)

“Of course there must be lots of Magic in the world,’ he said wisely one day, ‘but people don’t know what it is like or how to make it. Perhaps the beginning is just to say nice things are going to happen until you make them happen.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 297 – 298)

Both magic and religion are superterrestrial elements that cannot be influenced by humans, and therefore they provide sanctuary and comfort during times of uncertainty or distress. Many people turn to them while seeking stability and security, or they find the answer in religion while navigating difficult life challenges and while feeling hopeless and powerless. Religion is usually associated with the sense of belonging to a tight, united community, which offers support and reassurance. The children also got to experience this feeling – once Colin expressed his desire to voice his gratitude for magic, Ben Weatherstaff pointed out the similarity between their magic and religion and suggested they sang Doxology. Through Dickon, Mary and Colin learn that Doxology is sung at church with the aim to praise God. Dickon teaches the others about the religious processes in church, such as the custom of taking off a cap before entering the church and singing Doxology. Dickon’s character once again serves as a mentor for Mary and Colin who had no experience with religion until this point. Colin feels appreciative after Dickon demonstrates Doxology and sees the parallel between “Magic” and religion himself.

“It is a very nice song,’ he said. ‘I like it. Perhaps it means just what I mean when I want to shout out that I am thankful to the Magic.’ He stopped and thought in a puzzled way. ‘Perhaps they are both the same thing. How can we know the exact names of everything?’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 344)

Colin even suggests that religion and what they call Magic might be one and the same thing. After this experience, he wants to try singing Doxology on his own and this type of ritual moves Ben Weatherstaff to tears.

“[...] when the ‘Amen’ came to an end Mary observed that the very same thing had happened to him which had happened when he found out that Colin was not a cripple - his chin was twitching and he was staring and winking and his leathery old cheeks were wet. ‘I never seed no sense in th’ Doxology afore,’ he said hoarsely, ‘but I may change my mind i’ time. I should say tha’d gone up five pound this week, Mester Colin - five on ‘em!’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 345)

When Ben Weatherstaff, who appeared to be indifferent towards the matters of religion, starts understanding the importance and power of Doxology, it shows the readers another

parallel between magic and religion. No matter the name, Ben considered the recovery of Colin an unbelievable miracle, that even such a sceptical person as him started to believe in wonders. A similar situation occurs after Colin meets Dickon's mother and asks her whether she believes in Magic. Susan Sowerby answers that she does, although she never called it that way.

"'Never thee stop believin' in th' Big Good Thing an' knowin' th' world's full of it an' call it what tha likes. [...] Th' Magic listened when tha' sung th' Doxology. It would ha' listened to anything tha'd sung. It was th' joy that mattered. Eh! lad, lad what's names to th' Joy Maker.'"
(Burnett, 1911, p. 350)

The parallel between magic and religion is apparent in the extract above. Mrs. Sowerby implies that the name we put on it is insignificant, what matters is the act of believing. By calling it a "Big Good Thing" or "Joy Maker" and indicating that it is listening to us under all circumstances, the similarity to God and praying is evident. The children start doing their ritual of praising Magic regularly, mirroring religious ceremonies and liturgical practices.

"'You learn things by saying them over and over and thinking about them until they stay in your mind forever and I think it will be the same with Magic. If you keep calling it to come to you and help you it will get to be part of you and it will stay and do things.'"
(Burnett, 1911, p. 301)

Whether one labels it as Magic, religion or a completely different term, the children learn to express their gratitude regularly and not to take anything for granted. No matter if the author intended the evident parallel between magic and religion, both of them are portrayed as positive entities that one can escape to.

6.7 India as a British colony – racism in the story

Between the years 1857 and 1947, the Indian subcontinent was under direct British rule. This period of time is referred to as "British Raj" and the novel also touches on the subject, since it was published in 1911 and the beginning of the story takes place in India. The main character, Mary Lennox was born there and her father works under the British government. This fact explains their privileged lifestyle, which is later shown to be harmful to Mary's

development. The contrasts between England and India become evident after Mary moves to Yorkshire.¹⁷

“‘It is different in India’, said Mistress Mary disdainfully. She could scarcely stand this. But Martha was not at all crushed. ‘Eh! I can see it’s different,’ she answered almost sympathetically. ‘I dare say it’s because there’s such a lot o’ blacks there instead o’ respectable white people. When I heard you was comin’ from India I thought you was a black too.’” (Burnett, 1911, p. 34)

The lives of the native people were traumatizing in multiple ways. They faced difficult challenges and often suffered from extreme poverty and malnutrition, while Britain profited from them. They exported vast quantities of merchandise from India, such as pepper, tea, cotton or silk and sold them for a high profit in Britain, which helped to fund the Industrial Revolution there. For instance, they used the money to build textile factories in Britain, that employed women and children under harsh working conditions, and then sold the clothes and fabrics for an expensive price back in India. At that time, Britain was producing half of the world’s cotton cloth. The social position of the native people is also captured in the novel, portraying them as servants to white British people such as Mary’s family. The nine-year-old Mary, who is used to the servants obeying her all her life cannot imagine that not all native people are servants and genuinely believes that she is superior to them.^{18 19 20}

Martha’s character symbolizes common, country people living in England. Her limited knowledge of native people is shown through her assumption that everyone in India has black skin, and despite her own low social status in England, she considers even herself to be superior to them, which was expressed by calling the white people “respectable”. Just the mere thought of Martha’s assumption that Mary would have black skin deeply offended Mary, showing her opinion on the native people once again.

¹⁷ WOLPERT, Stanley A. *British raj - Indian and Pakistani history* [online]. [cit. 9.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.britannica.com/event/British-raj>

¹⁸ ALEXANDER, Colin. *Colonialism in India was traumatic – including for some of the British officials who ruled the Raj* [online]. [cit. 10.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-in-india-was-traumatic-including-for-some-of-the-british-officials-who-ruled-the-raj-77068>

¹⁹ *British colonialism in India* [online]. [cit. 10.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z7kvf82/articles/zx8sf82>

²⁰ HOPLEY, Claire. *A history of the British cotton industry* [online]. [cit. 10.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://britishheritage.com/history/history-british-cotton-industry>

"'What! You thought I was a native! You - you daughter of a pig!' [...] Mary did not even try to control her rage and humiliation. [...] '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. You know nothing about anything!'" (Burnett, 1911, p. 34 – 35)

Mary was convinced that the native people could not be compared to her as she did not even consider them people. She held such a negative opinion of them that she believed all of them are subordinate to her. It is mentioned at the beginning of the novel that Mary is aware of the fact that the most offensive thing one could call a native is “a pig” or “daughter of a pig” and she calls them that on purpose when she gets frustrated. She resorts to that even after her conflict with Martha who is not a native. The way Mary treats the natives in the novel mirrors the behaviour of the British towards the native people in those times.

The language in some parts of the novel also reflects the period of colonialism by using certain Indian expressions. For example, Mary’s mother is always referred to as “Mem Sahib”, which was a term used to describe rich, white, upper-class women from Europe married to British officials, especially during the British rule. Mary is sometimes called “Missie Sahib” as her daughter. Another Indian term could be understood in two possible ways – Ayah could either be interpreted as the name of Mary’s servant, but it was also an expression for an Indian maid or nurse, especially in colonial households. Lastly, Mary says Colin reminds her of Rajahs and starts calling him that way. Rajah means either an Indian prince or an Indian king, and Mary uses this nickname offensively, when she sees Colin treating the Misselthwaite housemaids in a rude, spoiled manner.^{21 22 23}

Another situation that shows the lack of knowledge on the outside world of the common English people is the moment, when Martha admits her disappointment in Mary not having a black skin.

“'I've nothin' 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. When I come in to light your fire this mornin'

²¹ *Memsahib*. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary* [online]. [cit. 11.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/memsahib>

²² *Ayah*. In *Thesaurus.com dictionary* [online]. [cit. 11.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ayah>

²³ *Rajah*. In *Dictionary.Cambridge.com dictionary* [online]. [cit. 11.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rajah>

I crep' up to your bed an' pulled th' cover back careful to look at you. An' there you was, ' disappointedly, 'no more black than me. ' ” (Burnett, 1911, p. 34)

Martha's character represents the lower class living in the English countryside, leading a sheltered life in the proximity of their household and work. The idea of meeting a person of colour appeared fascinating to her, as it was something she never experienced while living in Yorkshire. What connected those two seemingly distant worlds was religion. Since the tracts, religious pamphlets or essays presented black people as spiritual brothers, Martha overcame her racism and saw a certain degree of equality between them.²⁴

To conclude this chapter, racism is not a prominent topic of the novel, since the target audience consists mainly of children and the author emphasized different motifs more, such as hope, recovery and friendship, yet it plays a certain role as a part of the story takes place in India. Understanding Mary's upbringing is vital for the rest of the story, as it is centred around her character development from a spoiled unhappy child to a grateful, hard-working and polite one. Those aspects of the novel could be seen as problematic. The contrast between India and England makes India come across as an uncivilized dangerous place that Mary had to be saved from in order to live a happy life. In addition, every native character is portrayed as a servant who is inferior to the British. Those circumstances portray colonial thinking, and although it might not have been the aim of the author, the novel undoubtedly contains some elements of racism.

²⁴ *Tract*. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (3rd ed.) [online]. [cit. 11.4.2023]. Retrieved from WWW: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803105158389>

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the main goal of this bachelor thesis was to analyse the space of garden in children's fiction, especially in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* from 1911. The main focus points of the theoretical part were the function of space, how is garden as a space described and the allegory of the garden. For a better understanding of the historical and cultural context of the early twentieth century, the beginning of the theoretical part is dedicated to the overview of children's literature history, starting from the period of Enlightenment and ending with contemporary authors. Lastly, the Victorian and Edwardian elements of the novel are put into contrast, similarly to the Gothic and Romantic elements, which symbolize the opposite entities of the outside and inside – the mansion and the garden.

The practical part concentrated on a detailed literary analysis of motifs connected to the secret garden or Edwardian Era. The author indirectly criticizes it – the novel follows a story of a ten-year-old girl, Mary, who lives with her privileged family in India, during the times when it was a British colony. Her spoiled and impolite attitude is the result of her parents neglecting her and letting servants take over their role instead. Burnett criticizes Mary's parents for not making her upbringing and education a priority and treating the servants rudely in front of her, setting the wrong kind of example. At the age of ten, Mary is racist and arrogant towards her parents' employees, who were all native people. Her behaviour mirrors the actions of white people in times of colonization.

After Mary moves to Yorkshire, she begins to understand what the most important values in life are. Through Dickon and his highly idealized family, she learns what a functional family looks like and Dickon's mother becomes the motherly figure she never had to her – the same could be said about Colin. Mary observes the significance of the countryside values such as hard work and gratitude and she begins to practice them in her life as well. Readers can observe the remedy of two orphans, both moral and physical, owing to the secret garden and rough Yorkshire climate.

The space of the secret garden substitutes home for Mary and Colin. Every child needs a sense of belonging somewhere and their own space, and the garden provides that. When Mary gets inside, she breaks the curse of the locked garden and begins her recovery journey. This shows that a child is capable of changing anything if it sets its mind to it. The garden is put into contrast as a sacred place with the mysterious mansion. Even the similarities between the words sacred and secret suggest how synonymous those two words were for the children, and the

secret garden truly represented a sacred place for them. In spite of beginning the story as an orphan with no sense of home, Mary proceeds to find that feeling in the space of the garden, creating precious memories that she will look back onto in her adulthood.

Although *The Secret Garden* is predominantly a Victorian novel, multiple evident Gothic elements can be found in it. The mystery of the Misselthwaite Manor, with hundreds of locked rooms and imprisoned tantrums-throwing child, the fear of the unknown, dark, gloomy Yorkshire weather, mysterious noises to be heard at night, which turn out to be a child crying – all of these elements contrast the Romantic elements. The desire to find peace in nature, specifically in the secret garden, the Romantic concept of magic, explaining all nature treasures and finding inspiration outdoors as a result of the divine creation. The children creating a harmonical space in the secret garden, deepening their friendship, tending the garden, respecting one another but also themselves.

Even though over one hundred years have passed since the publication of *The Secret Garden*, its moral lessons and timeless themes are still actual today, and relatable to readers of all ages. The novel even deals with today's modern topics, such as personal growth, self-discovery and mental well-being. The story proposes the positive impacts of spending time outdoors and connecting with nature, which is relevant especially in today's technology-driven society. *The Secret Garden* stays a beloved classic, as it discusses universal topics and suggests that even in the worst times, happiness, recovery and hope can be found.

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