

Wuthering Heights for Children: Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*

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English children's author, Frances Hodgson Burnett, was two years old¹ when Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, was published in 1847, shocking critics, the public and her sister, Charlotte. In 1910, sixty-three years after the book's publication, Burnett published a story for children, entitled, *The Secret Garden*. A detailed examination of this work seems to demonstrate in its text a close reading of *Wuthering Heights* and certain similarities between the two books, particularly in the characters and their relationships with each other, indicate that Burnett may indeed have been influenced by the earlier work. The fact that she was writing for children necessitated for her a softening of Brontë's sterner fictional imperatives and led Burnett to the image of the hidden garden as a sanctuary protected from the grimmer grandeur of Brontë's Yorkshire moors.² Burnett, herself, seems to point to a connection between the two books through an insistence in her text on the verbal link word "wuthering."³ Her principal character, Mary Lennox, is fascinated by the word and its meaning, and such an emphasis might be considered at least one explicit authorial pointer to the title of Brontë's earlier work. This article seeks to examine the connection between Burnett and Brontë, and to identify particular aspects of setting, plot, character, language and symbolism in Burnett's novel which appear to have been inspired by the earlier template of *Wuthering Heights*, as well as instances where the later novel differs from Brontë's work.

Connections between Burnett and the Brontës

Frances Hodgson Burnett was born in Manchester, some twenty-six miles, as the crow flies, from Haworth, on 24 November 1849, two years after the publication of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Agnes Grey*, and some eight years before the posthumous publication (1857) of *The Professor*. Her father, Edwin Hodgson, was a Manchester businessman who, like Patrick Brontë, wrote small prose pieces, poetry, and many letters to local newspapers under the pseudonyms "Pro Bono Publico," "Cives" and "Irate Citizen."⁴ He may also have been, although this has as yet to be confirmed, a kinsman of William Hodgson,⁵ Reverend Patrick's curate from 1836-7. According to Burnett, her mother, Eliza Boond Hodgson, was a great admirer of Harriet Martineau,⁶ sometime friend of Charlotte Brontë.⁷

By 1853, young Frances, although only four years old, was already an avid reader. According to her son, Burnett's father "had been a bookish man, and small Frances, sooner than most children, began to take advantage of her 'literary surroundings.'"⁸ Romances became her passion.⁹ As they had on other impressionable young girls, the romances of the sisters Brontë had a tremendous impact on Burnett. As one of her biographers noted: "Principal themes in the fiction of Frances Hodgson Burnett were forecast in seven books published within two years of her birth . . . (and) the authors of these works would be among the most important in shaping her fiction—[these included] Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50) . . ."¹⁰ Born during Charlotte Brontë's lifetime to parents keenly aware of the contemporary literary scene, daughter of father who may have been related to one of Patrick Brontë's curates, young Frances spent the first fifteen years of her life less than thirty miles from Haworth reading romances. More than one scholar has identified and described "the echoes of *Jane Eyre* in *The Secret Garden*"¹¹ but the contribution of *Wuthering Heights* has been less recognized.

Differences and Similarities of Setting

Both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Secret Garden* take place in Yorkshire. Yet while Brontë portrays that shire as a vast, mysterious, nearly mystical place, Burnett sketches her own concept of the shire's mystical aspects in brief descriptions related to Mary Lennox by Mrs. Medlock and Martha and Dickon Sowerby. Both novels incorporate elements of the supernatural, where the voice of the lost beloved (Catherine Earnshaw and Lillias Craven) of the adult male protagonist (Heathcliff and Archibald Craven) speaks to the living. The principal events in each work happen, however, in significantly diverse environments. Brontë's plot leans heavily on the gloomy, looming presence of the Yorkshire moors. For her, the moors were as unpredictable as human nature, at once majestic and tormenting, liberating and destructive. Burnett, on the other hand, seems uneasy with the very wildness that so fascinated Emily. ". . . it's just miles and miles and miles [her heroine, Mary Lennox, is told] of wild land that nothing grows on but heather and gorse and broom, and nothing lives on but wild ponies and sheep . . . It's a wild, dreary enough place to my mind, though there's plenty that likes it . . ." ¹²

For Burnett in *The Secret Garden*, the moors are a place described but never experienced first-hand. Her central character, Mary Lennox, crosses the moors at night and never during the course of the story ventures out upon them again. The chief reason for this may be that unlike Emily Brontë, Burnett had only a limited working knowledge of the Yorkshire moors. Instead, she creates a safer environment for her child readers, surrounded by but separate from the wilderness of the unknown moors. This was an environment with which she, herself, was familiar, an enclosed garden, wild and overgrown but an oasis contained in a way that the moors could never be. Significantly, Mary Lennox has the momentary illusion of sailing on the sea as she drives across the moors in the dark. This image of the moors as a vast, unpredictable ocean reinforces the subsequent image of the garden as an island of refuge not only from the unpredictability of the 'outside'

natural world but from the unpredictability of adult human emotions which in both books are mirrored in natural events.

Although she diverged from Brontë by refashioning her exterior setting, Burnett kept untouched the mouldy mystery of her novel's interiors, a gloomy old house haunted by the passions of the past. Yet Burnett's great, gloomy pile of Misselthwaite Manor seems to owe more to Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre's* Thornfield Hall than to either the ancient farmhouse of Wuthering Heights or the more affluent manor of Thrushcross Grange. Certainly the plot device common to both books, that of the young female stranger hearing wild human sounds behind locked doors and thick walls in forbidden parts of the house, seem closely related. But if Burnett appears to have borrowed from Charlotte Brontë the pattern for the ancient house in which she set her story, it was Emily Brontë's work which appears to have had the greater influence on Burnett's characters and principal points of her story.

A Comparison of Characters

For *The Secret Garden*, Burnett has created a cast of characters, each of which appears influenced by one or more of the characters in *Wuthering Heights*. Both books begin with the arrival of a child into, what is for them, the alien environment of Yorkshire. There are similarities as well as differences between these two children—Mary Lennox and Heathcliff. Like Heathcliff, Mary is an orphan, irascible and sullen. She was, according to her creator, "the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen . . . [with] a sour expression . . . [and] as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived."¹³ Burnett makes the orphaned Mary at nine years old roughly the same age as the orphaned Heathcliff when he first arrives at Wuthering Heights. She comes to Yorkshire from the 'outside,' an English child raised in India, home of the gypsies, as foreign to Yorkshire as is the gypsy boy Heathcliff. Both speak words the locals cannot understand—Heathcliff, Romany and Mary,

Hindi—although Mary has the advantage of speaking English as well. Just as it is the appearance on the scene of the self-willed Heathcliff with his ungovernable passions which initiates the action in *Wuthering Heights*, so it is the appearance of the self-willed Mary Lennox and her equally uncontrolled nature which precipitates the action in *The Secret Garden*. Yet the two authors take their protagonists in different directions. Heathcliff grows from a surly, violent boy into a surly, violent man. Mary, like the garden which comes to obsess her, metamorphoses into a civilized, sympathetic human being with a concern for the opinions and welfare of others. She sheds her original selfish egocentrism as the garden sheds its weeds beneath her hand. Unlike Heathcliff, who mirrors the destructive aspects of nature, Mary, within the context of the garden, comes to embody the constructive aspects which nurture life.

Mary's uncle, Archibald Craven, tall, dark, morose and brooding, is prey to the same passions as the adult Heathcliff. Although shorn of Heathcliff's deliberate malice, Craven is still possessed of a soul-destroying obsession centered on his lost wife. This obsession brings destruction and despair to himself and to those around him. Burnett describes Craven as a man who "poisoned the air about him with gloom. Most strangers thought he must be either half mad or a man with some hidden crime on his soul."¹⁴ He certainly seems Heathcliff's soulmate. Craven's lost beloved and permanent fixation is his beautiful deceased wife, Lilies. Gravely hurt when a tree branch breaks under her, she, like Heathcliff's Cathy, subsequently dies in childbirth. Craven blames the loss of his wife both on the garden where the accident occurred and, again like Heathcliff, on the child whose premature birth hastened her untimely death. Craven takes his revenge by locking up the garden, confining the boy at Misselthwaite and then abandoning both. Heathcliff's revenge includes the confinement of his own son, Linton, and of Cathy's daughter, Catherine Linton, at *Wuthering Heights*.

Mary Lennox is for Burnett both the chief protagonist in *The Secret Garden* and the catalyst which begins the action. In the early chapters,

as a catalyst, she stands in relationship to her own story where Heathcliff stands in relationship to his. Yet there are marked differences between them. Heathcliff is introduced into an apparently happy family which he is instrumental in breaking apart. Mary is introduced into an unhappy family which she is instrumental in bringing together. Her role as the story progresses seems increasingly to emulate the role played by the young Catherine Linton in *Wuthering Heights*.¹⁵ This is not as contradictory as it might appear given the dramatic alteration in Mary's character within the context of the action. The same stubborn streak of sullen rebellion which pits the will of Heathcliff against that of Catherine Linton in the second half of *Wuthering Heights* is reflected in the sullen streak of stubbornness that is part of the character of Mary Lennox. Yet Mary later learns to use this stubbornness to good purpose in her dealings with her cousin Colin, just as Catherine's stubborn animosity toward Heathcliff leads her to initiate a relationship with her cousin Hareton which proves to be the salvation of them both. Other similarities exist between Mary and Catherine. Both are strongly attracted to 'nature boys,' rough illiterates at home on the moors. Both boys are shown to be superior in character to the two male cousins of the girls' own class. Dickon, the boy from the moors, who plays a pipe like Pan and charms animals, fits the structure of *The Secret Garden* like a minor woodland god. He seems to be Burnett's version of Hareton Earnshaw, the cousin who marries Catherine Linton after Heathcliff's death. Hareton like Dickon is a man of the soil and is good with animals. Dickon's character in *The Secret Garden* is the one most in touch with the Divine, and seems to take its cues from Brontë's Hareton, whose own deep-rootedness in the Yorkshire moors is the natural balm that, despite circumstance, keeps him whole.

The third characters in these younger generational triads within the two stories are Linton Heathcliff and Colin Craven. They appear to grow from the same rootstock created by Brontë, but in *The Secret Garden*, Colin's life moves toward a different resolution. Colin lives

and flourishes while Linton withers and dies. Yet both are introduced by Brontë and Burnett in nearly identical terms.

Wuthering Heights

*A pale, delicate effeminate boy . . . [with] a sickly peevishness in his aspect . . . he was no sooner seated than he began to cry afresh. . . . [My master] had been greatly tried during the journey, I felt convinced, by his fretful ailing charge.*¹⁶

The Secret Garden

. . . on the bed was lying a boy, crying fretfully [He] had a sharp delicate face the color of ivory and he seemed to have eyes too big for it. . . . He looked like a boy who had been ill, but he was crying more as if he were tired and cross than as if he were in pain.¹⁷

Archibald Craven's loathing for his son, Colin, reflects Heathcliff's loathing for his son, Linton, and for much the same reason. Both fathers see their sons as weaklings, unlikely ever to grow into strong men, an embarrassment rather than a source of pride. Craven (the choice of his name must surely have been deliberate) is not as malevolent as Heathcliff but his courage fails at the thought that this sickly, temperamental son will grow up like his father, to become the same physical and emotional cripple that Craven fears himself to be. For Heathcliff, these negative feelings are colored by his overmastering contempt for Linton's late mother, Isabella, and by Linton's striking likeness to her. For Archibald Craven, his repulsion toward his son is also intensified by Colin's striking physical resemblance to his late mother, but the difference between them is that Craven loved Colin's mother and the resemblance intensifies his grief rather than his anger.

This relational dynamic of physical resemblance intensifying feelings of love and loss appears, too, in Heathcliff's feelings for Hareton. He is both repulsed and agonized by Hareton's likeness to Cathy. His anguish at this constant reminder of his loss is described movingly by Brontë: ". . . if I could do it without seeming insane [Heathcliff tells Ellen Dean], I'd never see him again. . . . his startling likeness to Catherine connected him fearfully to her The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!"¹⁸ For Archibald Craven, nearly identical emotions run unbear-

bly deep and stamp his entire existence. "The first time after a year's absence he returned to Misselthwaite and the small miserable looking thing [Colin] languidly and indifferently lifted to his face the great gray eyes with black lashes round them, so like and yet so horribly unlike the happy eyes he had adored, he could not bear the sight of them and turned away pale as death."¹⁹ For Linton and Colin and for Hareton, their resemblances to their mothers (or aunt) create nearly insuperable gulfs between themselves and their fathers or, in Hareton's case, surrogate father.

Exposure to the Yorkshire air works an identical change in both Linton and Colin. For Linton, these are only temporary; for Colin, they appear to be permanent. When after much time, young Catherine first beholds Linton and Archibald Craven first beholds Colin, their responses are much the same.

Wuthering Heights

*He had grown tall of his age, still wanting some months of sixteen. His features were pretty yet, and his eye and complexion brighter than I remembered them 'What Lincoln!' cried Cathy, kindling into joyful surprise at the name. 'Is that little Linton? He's taller than I am! Are you, Linton?'*²⁰

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. . . Colin look[ed] an entirely different boy. . . . *The faint glow of color which had shown on his face and neck and hands when he first got inside the garden really never quite died away . . . Colin was standing upright . . . and looking strangely tall . . . It was the eyes which made Mr. Craven gasp for breath. 'Who—What? Who!' he stammered. . . . 'Father,' he said, 'I'm Colin.'*²¹

The relationship between the first cousins, Linton and Catherine, is repeated in *The Secret Garden* in the relationship between the first cousins Colin and Mary. Temperamental, high-strung, over-indulged and accustomed to having their own way, Catherine and Mary dominate at first the equally temperamental but physically weaker boys. The petulant interchanges between both sets of extremely spoiled children in the initial stages of their relationship echo each other in the two books.

Wuthering Heights

The invalid complained of being covered with ashes; but he had a tiresome cough, and looked feverish and ill, so *I did not rebuke his temper*. 'Well, Linton,' murmured Catherine, when his corrugated brow relaxed, 'Are you glad to see me? Can I do you any good?' 'Why didn't you come before?' He said, 'You should have come . . .'²²

The Secret Garden

'What is the matter?' [Mary] asked. 'What did Colin say when you told him I couldn't come?' 'Eh!' said Martha, 'I wish tha'd gone. *He was nigh goin' into one o' his tantrums. . . .*' This was a bad beginning and Mary marched up to him with her stiff manner. 'Why didn't you get up?' she said. 'I did get up this morning when I thought you were coming,' he answered, without looking at her. '*. . . Why didn't you come?*'²³

Brontë, with her plot that covers three generations, takes Linton and Catherine's relationship to its ultimate conclusion when Heathcliff forces Catherine into marriage with her cousin. Burnett, with her much briefer time frame, lets the question of Mary and Colin's future relationship go unanswered for, unlike Linton, Colin appears destined to live to adulthood.

Similarities of character development are also noticeable between Brontë's irascible, Bible-thumping farmhand Joseph and Burnett's irascible, curmudgeonly gardener Ben Weatherstaff. Both serve hard masters, but Burnett has given the surly local a softer edge as well as a measure of grace in his loyalty to the garden and to the son of the late Lillias Craven. Where daily exposure to a hard world has turned Joseph into a bitter man, one who sees the hand of Satan everywhere, Ben, despite his crusty exterior, is still capable of tenderness. One of the significant characteristics which defines both Joseph and Ben is their use of the broad Yorkshire dialect. Except for the three Sowerbys in *The Secret Garden*, none of the other principal characters in either book speak with such a broad accent despite the fact that most were born and raised in Yorkshire. This, of course, was a class issue at a time when children were carefully inculcated with proper speech patterns and forbidden to imitate the speech of the so-called lower

classes. Even Ellen Dean, who to all intents and purposes was grown from seed in the Yorkshire soil, speaks gentleman's English.

Plot Comparisons

With her audience in view, Burnett's plot construction is of necessity built along less complex lines than Brontë's. Such adult passions as Cathy and Heathcliff represent are treated only cursorily in *The Secret Garden* and were for Burnett not the stuff of children's stories. Lilies Craven, the story's 'lost beloved,' is less a wild and contradictory Catherine Earnshaw-like character than a reflection of the woman whom Cathy imagined herself becoming when she married Edgar Linton, beautiful, aristocratic, gracious, generous, loving and beloved. Although the love and loss represented in the relationship of Lilies and Archibald Craven is a necessary condition of the action which follows, it is marginalized somewhat by being treated in retrospect and by Craven's long periods of absence from Misselthwaite Manor. Within the context of Mary's interaction with the secret garden, itself, it is the developing relationships of Mary with Dickon and Colin which are Burnett's chief concerns.

Where Brontë creates a framing device for the inner core of her story which presents Ellen Dean as the teller of the tale and an outsider, Mr. Lockwood, as the narrator-observer, Burnett's framing device opens with Mary Lennox in India and then sends her off as a reluctant but generally impartial observer of people and events in Yorkshire. Yet Mr. Lockwood is and remains outside the main flow of the action in *Wuthering Heights* while Mary Lennox inhabits the emotional center of *The Secret Garden*. Emily Brontë's plot subsequently covers three generations; Burnett's time scheme covers a period of little over a year, beginning with Mary's loss of her parents in India and journey to England and ending with the arrival of Archibald Craven back at Misselthwaite Manor. Thus, Burnett frames *The Secret Garden* with two journeys into Yorkshire, albeit by two different characters. This is

similar to *Wuthering Heights*, whose story is framed by Lockwood's two journeys into Yorkshire. Once there, Mary befriends her sickly young cousin Colin, emotionally abandoned by his father and without a mother, and using tales of the secret garden attempts to woo him back to an awakened interest in life. In much the same way, Catherine Linton befriends and tries to aid her sickly young cousin, Linton, emotionally abandoned by his father and without a mother. Yet any echoes of Heathcliff's plans of revenge on the Lintons and Earnshaws are absent from *The Secret Garden*.

Nature and the supernatural play key roles in both books. It is Mary's growing affection for the illiterate but good-hearted Dickon, the impersonation of the healing power of nature, which releases the more positive aspects of her character. At the end of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Linton's hopes of a happier future are vested in her affection for the illiterate but good-hearted Hareton, like Dickon, a child of nature. For Emily Brontë, the savagery of the journey taken by some human hearts is reflected in the ravages wrought by the natural world. In *Wuthering Heights*, these are reflected in the flint-cored crags, stunted trees and pitiless storms of the moors. Burnett, with her smaller palette of garden flowers and bulbs, emphasizes not only nature's healing powers but the stirring of new life, growing from "that quiet earth" in which Brontë buries Heathcliff and Cathy. Nature offers spiritual inspiration in both books. In Brontë's, it is embodied in the open freedom but constant threat of danger on the moors; in Burnett's, it is found in the safer enclosed haven of a rose garden. In dealing with the supernatural, nature's other face, Burnett sentimentalizes the otherworldly, unlike Brontë, whose depiction of the ghost of the dead Catherine Earnshaw haunts the moors and terrifies Mr. Lockwood into the unwonted cruelty of dragging her wrist across a piece of broken window glass. In Burnett's story, the gentler ghost of Lillias Craven, whose voice alone is heard, appears to watch over her son and husband and tries to bring them once again into harmony with the earth and with each other. Catherine's ghost seems totally indifferent to her widower, Edgar Linton, and to her namesake

daughter. It is not to Thrushcross Grange but to Wuthering Heights that her ghost returns.

Language, Symbolism and Metaphor

Necessarily, given its target audience, *The Secret Garden* is written in simpler language with less complex and subtle symbolism than *Wuthering Heights*. Yet there are numerous linguistic links which tie it to the earlier work. Burnett, for example, gives a minor character in the book the name "Bob Haworth,"²⁴ a tribute perhaps to Brontë's Yorkshire village. As mentioned in the introduction, she also makes frequent use of the Yorkshire dialect word "wuthering," which forms part of Brontë's title. Although not an uncommon word, it is insisted upon repeatedly by Burnett. ". . . the wind was 'wuthering' round the corners and in the chimneys of the huge old house . . . [Mary] hated the wind and its 'wuthering' . . . She could not go to sleep again. . . . How it 'wuthered' and how the big rain-drops poured down and beat against the pane! 'It sounds just like a person lost on the moor and wandering on and on crying,' she said."²⁵ Just so did Lockwood, mixed with the wuthering of the wind, hear the crying of the ghostly Catherine Earnshaw, lost on the moor for twenty years, trying to find her way home.

Counterpoised against Heathcliff's rootless anguish, shared by the wandering Archibald Craven in *The Secret Garden*, both Brontë and Burnett explore the path to redemption forged by Catherine Linton and by Mary Lennox in their respective novels. For these two characters, the earth and its potential flowering assumes paramount and symbolic importance. "Might I [Mary asks Archibald Craven], might I have a bit of earth . . . to plant seed in—to make things grow—to see them come alive."²⁶ While Craven's response is startled but favorable, Heathcliff responds violently to a similar request. "We wanted to plant some flowers [Catherine Linton tells him]. . . . You shouldn't grudge a few yards of earth, for me to ornament, when you have

taken all my land!"²⁷ For both authors, the planting of seed in the earth represents an overt commitment, despite uncertainties, to the future rather than to the misery and mistakes of the past. For Catherine, the decision to "plant some flowers" is to risk bringing Heathcliff's wrath down on her head, yet it proves to be the catalyst which begins a new and ultimately joyful phase in her relationship with Hareton. For Mary, the request for "a bit of earth" also represents risk, one that could incur Craven's anger and lead to discovery of the secret garden and its consequent loss. Within the symbolism of Catherine and Mary's claims to a physical piece of earth, in the planting of it and in the final unfolding of nature's beneficence, despite Heathcliff's animosity and Craven's potential anger, a spring of resurrection eventually awakens, one that heralds the ending of both stories.

Burnett takes up the idea of this impending and mystical change, inaugurated by Mary and reverberating in the life of Archibald Craven, in what might be a paraphrase of the feelings that Heathcliff describes in one of his last conversations with Ellen Dean. For Heathcliff, this change is the precursor of his own death and thus of his ultimate reunion with Cathy. Burnett turns that idea around and makes the change a precursor to the renewal of Archibald Craven's life through his emblematic reunion with his own dead wife in the living person of their son. A comparison of the images used in the descriptions of the emotions of Heathcliff and Craven illustrates the similarity.

Wuthering Heights

'It's a poor conclusion, is it not . . . I don't care for striking, I can't take the trouble to raise my hand! . . . I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing. Nelly, there is a strange change approaching—I'm in its shadow at present. I take so little interest in my daily life, that I hardly remember to

The Secret Garden

He did not know how long he sat there or what was happening to him, but at last he moved as if he were awakening Something seemed to have been unbound and released in him . . . as the train whirled him through mountain passes and golden plains the man who was 'coming alive' began to think in a new way 'Perhaps I have

eat and drink. Those two who have left the room . . . [their appearance] causes me pain, amounting to agony. . . . 'But what do you mean by a change, Mr. Heathcliff?' I said, alarmed at his manner . . . from childhood he had a delight in dwelling on dark things, and entertaining odd fancies.²⁸

been all wrong for ten years . . . ' If he had not been under the spell of the curious calmness which had taken possession of him he would have been more wretched than ever.²⁹

Although Brontë and Burnett use different language to explain their characters' altered state, yet the ideas are similar. Apparent nature and its corollary, the supernatural, have brought two anguished men to the brink of healing, one through death and the mingling of dust, and one through life and the acknowledgment of the healing power of a well-loved piece of earth.

Other Influences on *The Secret Garden*

Although the influence of *Wuthering Heights* may have provided the foundation for *The Secret Garden*, additional influences other than Brontë's work can be demonstrated in Burnett's novel.³⁰ In the short autobiography which Burnett wrote in 1893 about her own childhood, *The One I Knew Best of All*, she describes the Aladdin's cave of books which was her father's library and in particular, a book on the history of the Tower of London which led her to act out various dramatic historical scenes through the aegis of her dolls.³¹ The story of Richard III and the little princes fascinated her and in the character of Archibald Craven, she has incorporated Richard's crooked back and the atmosphere of gloom, guilt and foreboding which surrounds him. Together with the bereaved and wolfish Heathcliff, Burnett's friend, the Earl of Crewe, may have acted as additional inspiration for Archibald Craven and for the laughing portrait of Lilius Craven which hung in Colin's bedroom and at which, together with his son, Craven

could not bear to look. In 1896 Burnett visited the Earl at his home of Fryston Hall, near Ferrybridge, Yorkshire.

[Crewe, she later wrote] married when he was quite young, Sybil Maria, daughter of Sir Frederick Ulric Graham, and she died seven years after. Lady Fitzgerald, her sister, says they were radiantly happy and inseparable. . . In the drawing room at Fryston there is a picture of a pretty, slender girl in a white frock, and beneath it is written, 'Sybil 1887'—that was the year she died. I believe his eyes are always looking for her and thinking of her.³²

Burnett's own son, Vivian, wrote a biography of his mother in 1927, three years after her death, and in it he describes her fascination with Christian Science and the works of its founder, Mary Baker Eddy. "That her method of thought, consciously or unconsciously, was influenced importantly by what she learned from Christian Science, there is ample testimony . . . [*The Secret Garden*] is generally credited with being a Christian Science book . . ." ³³ For Burnett, the concepts that God is love and emanant in the world joined to the possibility of healing the body through the power of the mind were important ones. These she added to *The Secret Garden*, primarily in the form of Colin's disquisitions on Magic. Christian Science helped support her deeply held conviction, and one which she no doubt had reason to believe from *Wuthering Heights* was shared by Brontë, that death is not the end of life.³⁴ This need to believe in a life after death is tied for both Brontë and Burnett to the tragedy of terminal tuberculosis. In 1848, Emily, like her character the teen-aged Linton Heathcliff, died of tuberculosis. Forty-two years later, Frances Burnett buried her fifteen-year-old son, Lionel, who had died within nine months of being diagnosed with the same disease. In much the way that Heathcliff appeals to the ghostly Cathy to haunt him in any shape she chooses, so Burnett wrote impassioned passages more or less asking her dead son to do the same. "Do you come and look over my shoulder and help me?" she wrote to him four months after his death. "I try to feel that you do."³⁵ This sense of loss must have intensified her empathy with Brontë and appears to have manifested itself in the creation of Archibald Craven's overmastering grief for his dead wife.

Burnett's own passion for gardening, too, inspired her creation of *The Secret Garden*.³⁶ Dubbed 'The Passionate Gardener' by her son and the 'Princess of Maytham' by Henry James for the beauty of her garden, Burnett leased Maytham Hall in Kent from 1898 through 1907. The grounds contained an old walled garden that Burnett planted with roses and used as her out-of-doors workroom. According to her son, it served as the model for the secret garden.³⁷ It was in 1910, shortly after being forced to give up her lease on Maytham, that the rose garden there, the tenets of Christian Science, the continuing grief over Lionel's death, her memories of the Earl of Crewe and his lost Sybil, and earlier memories of the crooked, charismatic Richard III appear to have been grafted by Burnett onto the rootstock of Emily Brontë's great romance and fashioned into *The Secret Garden*.

Conclusion

Although the characters created by Burnett may have taken their origins from those created by Emily Brontë and although they make a similar journey toward self-discovery in the remote vastness of Yorkshire, Burnett's conclusion, influenced by her philosophical belief in the absolute love of God, is a classic fairy tale happy ending. Brontë's is a more realistic, subtly shaded resolution to the lives that she has chronicled. Yet Catherine Linton's match with Hareton Earnshaw could be characterized as a happy ending after all. The tone of *The Secret Garden* is certainly less dark than that of *Wuthering Heights*, but that is hardly surprising if, as may be so in this case, one author used a tale for adults as the inspiration for a tale for children. The concerns of both authors remain quite similar—obsession and its destructive qualities, the power of grief to suffocate life, the concept that love is stronger than death, the interaction of man and nature for both healing and destruction. While these concerns are certainly common in much of the literature published in the sixty years between *Wuthering Heights* and *The Secret Garden*, the precise correlations and the over-

whelming number of them found in Burnett's novel imply both an intense scrutiny of Brontë's work and its probable influence on her own.

La Canada
California

NOTES

¹Born and raised in England until the age of fifteen, Burnett moved with her widowed mother and siblings to eastern Tennessee in 1865 and thereafter considered herself an Anglo-American.

²Cf. Anna Krugovoy Silver, "Domesticating Brontë's Moors: Motherhood in *The Secret Garden*," *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 21.2 (1997): 193-203, here 197. Silver refers to this process as "the domestication of the Yorkshire moors" (196) and notes that, through the usage of the garden metaphor, "Burnett gives primacy to domestic values . . . over sexual passion between adult men and women (symbolized by the moors)" (198).

³Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1911) 154.

⁴Vivian Burnett, *The Romantick Lady* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1927) 3.

⁵Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994) 241-42, 269.

⁶Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The One I Knew Best Of All* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1893) 179.

⁷Barker 718-19.

⁸V. Burnett 12.

⁹V. Burnett 9.

¹⁰Phyllis Bixler, *Frances Hodgson Burnett* (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 1.

¹¹Ann Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1849-1924* (Boston: Godine, 1991) 3, 220-21; Bixler 125.

¹²F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 26-27.

¹³F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 1-2.

¹⁴F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 356.

¹⁵Silver 197.

¹⁶Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (New York: Signet Classics, 1993) 193-95. My italics.

¹⁷F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 156. My italics.

¹⁸Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 306-07.

¹⁹F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 363-64.

²⁰Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 208. My italics.

²¹F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 274, 281, 371. My italics.

²²Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 227. My italics.

²³F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 210. My italics.

²⁴F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 331. Burnett also wrote an earlier work, entitled *Haworth's*, published in 1879.

²⁵F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 154.

²⁶F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 148.

²⁷Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 303.

²⁸Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 306-07.

²⁹F. Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 358, 364.

³⁰In his book, *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1985) 188-89, Humphrey Carpenter throws out a potpourri of "details picked up casually from handy sources," that he claims Burnett used and compares the character of Dickon to Heathcliff. Very little if any evidence is offered for supposing Burnett was influenced by any of these 'handy sources' and they appear rather to have been chosen as a way of denigrating Burnett's work which Carpenter, despite basing the title of his book on hers, stigmatizes as "careless," "crudely drawn," "predictable," and "sloppy."

³¹F. Burnett, *The One I Knew Best* 115.

³²V. Burnett 270-72.

³³V. Burnett 376-77.

³⁴Silver 194.

³⁵V. Burnett 213.

³⁶Silver notes that for Victorian readers (and presumably Edwardian ones as well), gardens were "part of women's private domestic sphere, (and) were conceptualized as female space in nineteenth-century England" (195).

³⁷V. Burnett, plate opposite 294.