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A Hundred Years of *The Secret Garden*

Frances Hodgson Burnett's Children's Classic
Revisited

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Cover image: The illustration by Maria Louise Kirk shows the cover of the 1911 edition of "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. M. L. Kirk was a prolific illustrator, born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, circa 1860. She studied art in Philadelphia, and died in the 1930s. Thanks to James Stack, University of Washington Libraries.

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Contents

Marion Gymnich and Imke Lichterfeld <i>The Secret Garden</i> Revisited	7
Raimund Borgmeier The Garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett's <i>The Secret Garden</i> in the Context of Cultural History	15
Imke Lichterfeld 'There was every joy on earth in the secret garden' – Nature and Female Identity in Frances Hodgson Burnett's <i>The Secret Garden</i>	27
Anja Drautzburg 'It was the garden that did it!' – Spatial Representations with References to Illness and Health in Frances Hodgson Burnett's <i>The Secret Garden</i> . .	39
Angelika Zirker Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels: <i>Little Lord Fauntleroy</i> and <i>The Secret Garden</i>	53
Stefanie Krüger Life in the Domestic Realm – Male Identity in <i>The Secret Garden</i>	69
Sara Strauß Constructions of 'Otherness' in Frances Hodgson Burnett's <i>The Secret Garden</i>	77
Thomas Kullmann <i>The Secret Garden</i> and the Redefinition of Englishness	91

Hanne Birk	
Pink Cats and Dancing Daisies: A Narratological Approach to Anime and Film Versions of <i>The Secret Garden</i>	105
Ramona Rossa	
Forty Years On: Reimagining and Going Beyond <i>The Secret Garden</i> in Noel Streatfeild's <i>The Painted Garden</i>	125
Marion Gymnich	
Porridge or Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans? – Attitudes towards Food in Frances Hodgson Burnett's <i>The Secret Garden</i> and Other Children's Classics	141
Gislind Rohwer-Happe	
Edwardian Girlhood Fiction and the Tradition of the Female Novel of Development	167
Contributors	189

***The Secret Garden* Revisited**

Although Frances Hodgson Burnett published numerous works for an adult readership, she is mainly remembered today for three novels written for children: *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911).¹ *The Secret Garden*, serialized from autumn 1910 to summer 1911 in monthly instalments in *The American Magazine*, has often been referred to as Burnett's best novel² – despite the fact that “for the first fifty years after its publication *The Secret Garden* was never as popular as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* or *A Little Princess*”.³ Critics who consider *The Secret Garden* Burnett's masterpiece tend to emphasise in particular “the increasing depth and subtlety in the portrayal of her main child characters” and argue that “the work as a whole is richer than its predecessors in thematic development and symbolic resonance”.⁴

One of the crucial differences between her earlier novels and *The Secret Garden* is the strong focus on nature and its healing properties and the loving attention to both plants and animals, which turns the novel into a celebration of nature and its beauty. The description of the robin is certainly a particularly striking example of this tendency.⁵ Due to the way nature is depicted in *The Secret Garden*, the novel has to be seen in the tradition of pastoral literature, and,

1 Today most readers are presumably not aware of the fact that Burnett was a prolific and enormously successful writer: “Burnett published more than fifty novels, most of them for adults, and wrote and produced thirteen plays. She was the highest-paid and best-known woman author of her time, and from the time she was eighteen and published a short story in *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* her work was never turned down by any publisher.” (GERZINA, Gretchen Holbrook. “Preface.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006 [1911]. ix–x, ix.)

2 Cf., for instance, BIXLER KOPPES, Phyllis. “Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett: A Generic Analysis of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*.” In: *Children's Literature* 7 (1978): 191–207, 191.

3 HUNT, Peter. *Children's Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 211.

4 BIXLER KOPPES. “Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett.” 191.

5 On the depiction of the robin see also BURNETT, Frances Hodgson. “My Robin.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006. 199–208.

as Phyllis Bixler Koppes puts it, Burnett “gave symbolic enrichment and mythic enlargement to her poetic vision by adding tropes from a literary pastoral tradition at least as old as Virgil’s *Georgics*.”⁶ In her contribution to this volume Anja Drautzburg examines specifically the healing properties attributed to nature in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* on the background of the concept of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ developed in health geography. While many readers may perhaps be tempted to consider the description of nature and of the garden as a relatively ‘timeless’ aspect of Burnett’s novel, the notions regulating the depiction of gardening in the text of course have been informed by discourses about nature and gardening that have been shaped by cultural tradition. In his article Raimund Borgmeier situates the notions of gardening which are alluded to or implied in *The Secret Garden* in the wider framework of the cultural history of gardening. Especially the garden’s location in a landscape that is typical of Yorkshire, Northern England adds a special quality of ‘rough Englishness’. In his contribution to the present volume Thomas Kullmann discusses the representation of Yorkshire as the ‘Other’ and the redefinition of Englishness in *The Secret Garden*.

With the rise of the English landscape garden, garden architecture was of great interest in the nineteenth century, which also led to a growing importance of gardening advice manuals. The development one can observe in this text type in the course of the nineteenth century shows striking parallels to the depiction of gardening in Burnett’s novel: “The earlier garden texts tend to be pragmatic advice to the middle-class woman; later Victorian garden writing is indebted to New Woman and aesthetic prose and presents the garden as a varied scene of both energetic activity and dreamy, languorous contemplation.”⁷ In *The Secret Garden* the garden discovered by Mary certainly turns into a place “of both energetic activity and dreamy, languorous contemplation”. Moreover, the fact that Mary works in the garden with male companions is reminiscent of the way gardening was presented in advice texts from the nineteenth century: “Gardening is conceived in these texts less as a hobby passed from one woman to another, like (for example) cookery or dressmaking, and more as a past-time a woman was likely to indulge on her own or, at best, with advice from a competent male relative or neighbour.”⁸ Although it is Mary who discovers the neglected garden, she needs Dickon’s advice on how to turn the wilderness into an attractive garden. Thus, the novel follows the pattern established in the gardening advice texts with respect to gender roles. Given the fact that the advice texts from

6 BIXLER KOPPES. “Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett.” 198.

7 BILSTON, Sarah. “Queens of the Garden: Victorian Women Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text.” In: *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008): 1–19, 1–2.

8 BLISTON. “Queens of the Garden.” 4.

the nineteenth century already “authorize[d] physical labour for women”,⁹ for instance digging and pruning, Mary’s work in the garden is certainly not a radical departure from a gendered division of labour. Yet *The Secret Garden* arguably explores the potential of the garden as a space in between the private, female sphere of the house and the public, male sphere, “push[ing] at the separation of public and private spheres”,¹⁰ which played such a prominent role in Victorian society. *The Secret Garden* thus allows analyses with regard to female and male gender roles and social expectations. Moreover, gardening “is not just about pottering picturesquely in the herbaceous borders in these works [the gardening advice texts], it is an opportunity both to act and to think”.¹¹ On this background it seems hardly surprising that gardening contributes to turning Mary Lennox into a more mature, responsible and active individual.

The Secret Garden has managed to fascinate countless readers in the last one hundred years and has become a classic, appealing to both children and grown-up readers. Talking about her own (re-)reading experience in an article, Madelon S. Gohlke points out: “It [*The Secret Garden*] is one of the few books from my own childhood that I carried in memory with me into adulthood, not to be displaced by the books of greater density and magnitude which I read as I grew older.”¹² In fact, one might argue that *The Secret Garden* can be seen as what has come to be called ‘all-ages literature’.¹³ Like other children’s classics, *The Secret Garden* may certainly give rise to multiple readings, depending on the age and (reading) experience of the reader, thus attracting young readers as well as more mature ones. *The Secret Garden* has been internationally successful, having “been translated into nearly every language”.¹⁴ Moreover, its place in cultural memory has been secured by a number of audiovisual adaptations based (more or less loosely) on Burnett’s novel. In her contribution to this volume Hanne Birk compares different audiovisual adaptations of *The Secret Garden*: Agnieszka Holland’s filmic adaptation of Burnett’s novel from 1993, an animated version directed by Dave Edwards from 1994 and a third version which has been shaped by the Asian tradition of the anime and thus can be seen as an intercultural

9 BLISTON. “Queens of the Garden.” 4.

10 BLISTON. “Queens of the Garden.” 2.

11 BLISTON. “Queens of the Garden.” 5.

12 GOHLKE, Madelon S. “Re-Reading the Secret Garden.” In: *College English* 41,8 (1980): 894 – 902, 897.

13 Cf. EWERS, Hans-Heino. “Das doppelsinnige Kinderbuch. Erwachsene als Mitleser und Leser von Kinderliteratur.” In: Dagmar Grenz (ed.). *Kinderliteratur – Literatur auch für Erwachsene?* München: Fink, 1990. 15 – 24; BECKETT, Sandra L. (ed.). *Transcending Boundaries. Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*. New York/London: Garland, 1999; BONACKER, Maren (ed.). *Das Kind im Leser. Phantastische Texte als all-ages-Lektüre*. Trier: WVT, 2007.

14 GERZINA. “Preface.” ix.

translation of Burnett's classic. Further evidence for the impact of *The Secret Garden* is provided by the fact that it has become the reference point for a rewriting, Noel Streatfeild's *The Painted Garden* (1949), which transfers the story to California and modernizes many aspects of the text. Ramona Rossa explores the relationship between *The Secret Garden* and its intercultural translation in *The Painted Garden* in her article.

The fact that *The Secret Garden* is not just read by children, but also fondly remembered and (re-)read by adults may partially be due to Burnett's experience as a writer of novels for a grown-up readership. In some respects, one may in fact argue that *The Secret Garden* resembles literary texts written for adults rather than other children's novels. In particular the similarities with novels written by the Brontë sisters are striking.¹⁵ These similarities include, of course, the setting: The Yorkshire Moors provide an ominous background for *Wuthering Heights* as well as for *The Secret Garden*. Moreover, regarding the semantisation of space, the isolation of Misselthwaite Manor is reminiscent of the location of the house of the Earnshaws in Emily Brontë's novel. The description of Misselthwaite Manor, however, echoes the presentation of Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*, including the uncanny sounds emerging from a secret and well-guarded room in the building.¹⁶ In addition, Gothic features can be found in *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Secret Garden*. The Yorkshire gardener Ben Weatherstaff may be seen as a significantly more genial version of the servant Joseph from *Wuthering Heights*. Gisliind Rohwer-Happe argues in her contribution to this volume that the parallels to *Jane Eyre* also have to be seen in terms of the genre tradition of the female *bildungsroman*. Finally, *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Secret Garden* all celebrate the potential healing power of nature. In *Wuthering Heights* the new beginning and the reconciliation of opposites in the second generation is captured in the image of the younger Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw gardening together. While Heathcliff and Catherine are associated with the wild and dangerous moors, those characters that have learnt to discipline their emotions and to live together peacefully are interested in gardening, in making things grow.

In many respects *The Secret Garden* is very much a product of the era in which

15 Cf. SILVER, Anna Krugovoy. "Domesticating Brontë's Moors: Motherhood in *The Secret Garden*." In: *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21,2 (1997): 193–203 and FOSTER, Shirley and Judy SIMONS. "Frances Hodgson Burnett: *The Secret Garden*." In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006 [1911]. 324–41, 329.

16 Cf. BIXLER, Phyllis. "Gardens, Houses, and Nurturant Power in *The Secret Garden*." In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006 [1911]. 287–302, 296: "Miss Havisham's Satis House, Edward Rochester's Thornfield Hall, and Archibald Craven's Misselthwaite Manor are all patrimonial mansions with large unused portions and ghostly hidden residents."

it was written. Many literary critics have sought to identify the impact historical and political configurations have had on this children's novel; after all, as Danielle E. Price argues:

The Secret Garden is a novel that only could be nurtured in the late nineteenth century and brought to fruition at the beginning of the twentieth century – a time when interest in gardens reached a frenzy, when gender roles were being hotly contested, and when England was adjusting to the return of its colonizing subjects.¹⁷

In terms of its depiction of female gender roles *The Secret Garden* seems to strike an at times uneasy compromise between traditional and progressive notions of femininity. While Mary Lennox is certainly no 'New Woman' in the making, she is no demure little angel in the house, either. Her hot temper, her strong will and her bonding with male characters on largely equal terms turn her into a predecessor of female heroines of later twentieth-century children's literature ranging from Georgina/George in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* adventure series (1942 – 1962) to Hermione Granger in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997 – 2007). Many literary critics have discussed the female characters (both Mary and the different mother figures) in the light of changing female gender roles, yet few critics have focussed exclusively on the male characters so far. In her contribution to this volume Stefanie Krüger examines the ways in which male identity is addressed in *The Secret Garden*.

Another aspect of the novel that clearly shows how much it was shaped by its time is the way spatial and interpersonal relations are seen in the context of colonialism. Both *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* include references to (colonial) India. In this respect Burnett's novel can be situated in a literary tradition which includes Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1860), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892) and of course *Kim* (1901) and many other works by Rudyard Kipling. A number of literary critics have addressed the references to colonialism in Burnett's novels and have sought to evaluate them. In addition to Mary's childhood experiences in India, the references to Indian characters and the diamond mines in Burnett's *A Little Princess* of course also lend themselves to a discussion from a postcolonial perspective. In this volume Sara Strauß re-examines *The Secret Garden* from the point of view of postcolonial criticism by discussing how both India and Yorkshire are constructed as a significant 'Other' in the course of the novel.

One of the features that contribute to rendering *The Secret Garden* fascinating to the present day seems to be its enigmatic character. The reader time and again

17 PRICE, Danielle E. "Cultivating Mary: The Victorian *Secret Garden*." In: *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 26,1 (2001): 4 – 14, 4.

is confronted with mysteries – some of which remain unresolved right to the end. In terms of cognitive narratology one can argue that *The Secret Garden* offers the reader a number of red herrings by employing features that induce the reader to draw upon the literary frame of Gothic fiction or the sensation novel. All of the necessary ingredients are there: the isolated location, the large, old mansion, the mysterious crying at night, the apparently sinister hunchback, forbidden rooms and the locked and forbidden garden. Ultimately, however, there are no evil supernatural powers, nor is there any sinister conspiracy. And Mary Lennox certainly is no maiden-in-distress. Right from the start, Mary's demeanour prevents the reader from seeing her entirely as a helpless victim. She obviously has stamina and a will of her own, which eventually helps to make her own life better as well as Colin's. On a more concrete level, the reader is invited to join Mary's exploration of the unknown, be it her 'mother country' England, the halls and corridors of Misselthwaite Manor or the garden which has been locked for many years. What child can resist the lure of exploring the unknown?

The heterodiegetic narrator's stance may certainly appear quite unusual in *The Secret Garden*. While narrators in children's literature sometimes emphasise their superior knowledge, thus 'looking down' on the (child) protagonists (as well as occasionally 'talking down' to young readers), a narrator who at least at first expresses downright dislike for the protagonist is still rather uncommon. One can argue, however, that the narrative voice is quite effective. The denigrating comments on Mary Lennox will hardly convince the reader to dislike the protagonist. Given the fact that the reader gets a vivid description of the way Mary has been neglected by both of her parents and has been forgotten by everyone after the outbreak of the cholera epidemic, it is not particularly hard to account for Mary's sour face. By emphasising Mary's disagreeable nature and employing a narrative voice that criticises her instead of expressing pity for the lonely little girl, Burnett eschews the obvious danger of indulging in an overly sentimental depiction of the protagonist. In this respect *The Secret Garden* is very different from both *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*. The differences concerning the concept of the protagonist in *The Secret Garden* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as well as the linguistic and rhetorical implications of these differences are discussed in detail by Angelika Zirker in her article on "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels" in this volume.

Many of the articles in the present volume are based on papers delivered in the context of a conference dedicated to Burnett's *The Secret Garden* which took place at the University of Bonn in November 2010. We would like to thank the participants of this conference as well as the contributors to this volume for sharing with us their thoughts on one of the classics of English children's literature. We are grateful to Anna Coogan, Katharina Engel, Hatice Karakurt, Elisabeth Rüb and Klaus Scheunemann for their help with the organization of

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“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.”

(Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* 136)

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The Garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* in the Context of Cultural History

In the opening paragraph of her relatively recent essay “Strip Mines in the Garden: Old Stories, New Formats, and the Challenge of Change”, Margaret Mackey asserts the central importance of the garden not only in Burnett’s novel but in literature generally; she writes:

The image of the garden has a long and powerful literary and social history. It offers connotations of security, enclosure, beauty, and fruitfulness. It implies a convergence of the powers of nature and the powers of human intervention. It remains a primal image of paradise, lost but regainable. It can stand for safety but also for restriction.¹

This is certainly true, but it is not the complete picture. I would suggest that in addition to literary and social history one should also look at cultural history. And as far as the garden is concerned, there is, in British cultural history (one might even say European cultural history), the phenomenon of the English garden. As I intend to show, this concept plays a remarkable role in *The Secret Garden*. Considered from this point of view, the garden cannot only stand “for safety” and “for restriction”, as Mackey argues, but also for qualities like imaginative spontaneity and liberty.

The general importance of the concept of the English garden in the context of British and European cultural history can hardly be overestimated. The leading *History of British Gardening* expresses this with the following ironical but at the same time unmistakeable statement:

The pundits – and the word inevitably, to an Englishman, must carry some of the jocularity attached to its secondary dictionary meaning – assure us that one of our few contributions to the visual arts is the landscape garden; long ago it became canonized in the world of taste as *le jardin anglais*.²

1 MACKAY, Margaret. “Strip Mines in the Garden: Old Stories, New Formats, and the Challenge of Change.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006. 367 – 87, 367.

2 HADFIELD, Miles. *A History of British Gardening*. London: Murray, 1979. 179.

With less sense of humour and British understatement, the same idea is expressed by a German scholar who claims unequivocally: “The landscape garden is considered England’s most important contribution to European history of art.”³ And for a long time it has been understood – though this knowledge seems to be more or less forgotten or suppressed⁴ – that this concept of the English garden or *jardin anglais* or *Englischer Garten* was an early manifestation of the Romantic Movement, of the great European movement that is generally referred to as Romanticism.

As early as 1933, in a series of lectures later published under the title *The Great Chain of Being*, Arthur O. Lovejoy observed:

The vogue of the so-called ‘English garden’, which spread so rapidly in France and Germany after 1730, was [...] the thin end of the wedge of Romanticism, or of one kind of Romanticism. [...] this change of taste in gardening was to be the beginning and – I do not, assuredly, say, *the* cause, but the foreshadowing, and one of the joint causes – of a change in taste in all the arts and, indeed, of a change of taste in universes. In one of its aspects that manysided thing called Romanticism may not inaccurately be described as a conviction that the world is an *englischer Garten* on a grand scale.⁵

This Romantic concept of the English garden appears to have, directly and indirectly, influenced the secret garden in Burnett’s novel. I am going to discuss certain features and passages, where this becomes particularly manifest, and compare them with parallel elements in the early discussion of the concept. But, first of all, I would like to give a brief sketch of the essential features and the historical context of the new idea and mention a few names.

Before the new style of gardening was established in the 30s and 40s of the eighteenth century in England, the French or formal or baroque garden was the dominating model.⁶ Everybody knows its most illustrious example, Versailles, mainly the work of the famous garden architect André Le Nôtre, which he created for Louis XIV, the Sun King. The manner of Le Nôtre and his school in laying out ornamental gardens was popularized by Dezallier d’Argenville in his

3 “Der Landschaftsgarten gilt als der bedeutendste Beitrag Englands zur europäischen Kunstgeschichte.” (MAIER-SOLGK, Frank. “Nachwort.” In: Horace Walpole. *Über die englische Gartenkunst*. Edited by Frank Maier-Solkg. Translated by August Wilhelm Schlegel. Heidelberg: Manutius, 1994. 79.)

4 See my essay “The English Garden: An Early Manifestation of the Romantic Movement.” In: Christoph Bode and Sebastian Domsch (eds.). *British and European Romanticisms*. Trier: WVT, 2007. 273–83. I have freely used this essay for the present purpose.

5 LOVEJOY, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being. A Study of the History of an Idea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961. 15–16. Cf. also LOVEJOY, Arthur O. “The Chinese Origin of a Romanticism.” In: *Essays in the History of Ideas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948. 99–135, 101.

6 Cf. JELICOE, Sir Geoffrey and Susan JELICOE (eds.). *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. *passim*.

treatise *La Théorie et la pratique du jardinage*, which came out in 1709 and three years later became also available in an English translation. In the England of the late seventeenth century the formal style of gardening was generally admired as well, not least by the then reigning William and Mary, who, amongst other things, had the Frenchman Daniel Marot design the Great Fountain Garden at Hampton Court.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the leading English garden-designers, George London and Henry Wise, still adhered to the formal model. But in the second decade of the new century, the baroque style was more and more challenged and criticized. Charles Bridgeman and Stephen Switzer, the next generation of English garden-architects, can be seen as representing a period of transition. From 1730, with William Kent, who was originally a painter, the triumphant advance of the English or landscape garden set in. This was remarked by Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby in a frequently quoted letter, which he wrote, in 1734, to his father-in-law, the Earl of Carlisle:

There is a new taste in gardening just arisen, which has been practised with so great success at the Prince's garden in Town [Carlton House], that a general alteration of some of the most considerable gardens in the kingdom is begun, after Mr. Kent's notion of gardening, viz., to lay them out, and work without either level or line.⁷

(The phrase “work without either level or line” seems to be an appropriate way of describing the new style.) Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, the leading garden-designer of the next generation, and Humphrey Repton, in Jane Austen's time, continued and developed the concept. Yet also rich landowners, like Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, to whom Alexander Pope dedicates his “Fourth Moral Essay: The Epistle to Burlington”, and Henry Hoare, the owner of Stourhead, had an important share in the development of the new style of gardening.

How fundamental the change from the formal to the English garden was and that this is truly to be considered a change of paradigm can easily be seen when one compares representative plans, for example, of Versailles and Stourhead in Wiltshire. Without going into details, one can tell, virtually at first sight, the enormous difference between the two plans.

The first one is formal, regular, ornamental, with straight lines and definite geometrical patterns, like rectangles, squares, and circles, almost symmetrical with a middle axis and corresponding side axes. The total effect, particularly seen in the abstract form of a plan, seems to be that of a piece of embroidery; and this is, indeed, what Dezailler d'Argenville called his flower garden units: *parterres de broderie*. Accordingly, the trees and shrubs in a baroque garden were

⁷ JELlicoe and JELlicoe. *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*. 310.

treated merely as raw material; they were mostly evergreens clipped into different kinds of geometrical forms, like spheres, pyramids, and cylinders (and sometimes into sculptures of animals and human figures, known as topiary). The paths of the formal garden usually meet at a right angle. The general impression is decidedly artificial. The underlying principle can be expressed in terms of the rhetorical tradition as “*ars est demonstrare artem*” – the art that is applied here proudly delights in showing off as art.

The plan of the English garden looks quite different. Here everything seems irregular and accidental. There is decidedly no symmetry. The paths meet in irregular intersections, never at a right angle. We find a varied distribution of open country (lawn), sometimes interspersed with clumps (that is the term Kent used) of trees and shrubs and also with single trees or shrubs, and wooded areas, but there is no guiding principle or pattern discernible. The general impression here is clearly of natural scenery, and the underlying principle could be termed “*ars est celare artem*” – the art that is at work here is not meant to be recognized as art (in spite of the frequently enormous amount of expense and energy that was necessary to make an English garden).

The intended kind of reception is also different for both types of gardens. For the proud owner of a formal garden it may be sufficient – to simplify matters a little – to look out of the window or step out onto the terrace to admire its splendour because the whole garden is oriented towards his palace or mansion. In a landscape garden, however, it is necessary to walk around in order to appreciate all the beauties of the place, and for the famous English gardens, special routes are usually recommended.

Now, I do not want to maintain that Burnett’s secret garden *is* an English garden in the full sense of the term. By the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century, garden architecture had developed further, and the English or landscape garden was no longer the only possible and obligatory model. A survey speaks, for the nineteenth century, of “the equality of styles, the notion that no one mode of garden-making was correct, but that all styles were potentially valid and had to be judged by their own rules.”⁸

In Burnett’s secret garden there is also the older model of the *Hortus conclusus* discernible. A garden handbook gives the following definition for this:

Hortus conclusus, literally an enclosed garden, a secret garden within a garden. There is a literary/religious symbolism dating back to the Song of Songs which associated the Virgin Mary with the term: ‘enclosed’ represented her intact virginity, and the fruition of the garden represented the flowers of virtue. [...] When the medieval cult of the Virgin was at its height, Mary was identified frequently with the rose, and ‘Mary gardens’ would contain flowers each with its own meaning.

8 JELlicoe and JELlicoe. *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*. 171.

In practice the enclosed garden was often a rose-garden with fountains, walks, and arbours, surrounded by a hedge or wall, sometimes with turfed seats, a lawn, and paths.⁹

The secret garden that Mary discovers – and possibly the first name Mary in this context is no coincidence – is such an enclosed garden, and roses seem to be the dominant flowers in it. So this old, traditional concept appears to be at work here. Frances Burnett, who says about herself, “All my life I have been a passionate gardener” or “I have had many gardens in many countries”,¹⁰ consciously or unconsciously, was familiar with these conceptions.

However, I would argue that the secret garden where Colin recovers and regains his strength has, above all, decisive features of the Romantic concept of the English garden. In this regard, it is interesting to see that Frances Burnett herself views the garden and nature as completely positive, in contrast to the negative sphere of urban civilization – a contrast well-known from the works of the Romantic poets and writers. Quoting George Borrow's *Lavengro* and his remark “Life is sweet, brother!” she goes on with the following consideration:

One cannot murmur words like these to oneself when one lives in great cities where life is rank with the stench of petrol, day and night are roaring pandemonium, and sun, moon and stars seem not to belong to the system of things in which one is conscious only of smells and increasing uproar and the crowding of human bodies crushing past each other, while on all sides machinery drills and hammers, tearing down walls and roofs, reducing structures which once were homes to masses of bricks and mortar and flying clouds of dust.¹¹

From such a literally destructive sphere, one escapes to nature, to the garden, a place where wholeness, life, and health are to be found.

In the novel, we find, early on, a contrast established that is analogous to the antithesis between the formal garden and the English garden in cultural history. After Mary first hears from Martha about the secret garden that it is “locked up. No one has been in it for ten years,” (*Secret Garden* 21) and that it was Mrs. Craven's garden, she cannot help thinking about it. But when she walks outside what she observes at Misselthwaite Manor is different. We are told:

When she [Mary] had passed through the shrubbery gate she found herself in great gardens, with wide lawns and winding walks with clipped borders. There were trees, and flower-beds, and evergreens clipped into strange shapes, and a large pool with an old gray fountain in its midst. (*Secret Garden* 21)

9 JELlicoe and JELlicoe. *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*. 261.

10 BURNETT, Frances Hodgson. “In the Garden.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006. 209 – 14, 209.

11 BURNETT. “In the Garden.” 211.