
Frances Hodgson Burnett Literary works

Adilova Fotimaxon Muxammad Anasovna
lightliterature51@gmail.com

Senior teacher,
Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Annotation *This article examines the literary legacy of Frances Hodgson Burnett, one of the most influential authors of children's literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It analyzes Burnett's major works, including Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Little Princess, The Secret Garden, and The Lost Prince, with particular attention to their artistic features, thematic structure, and enduring cultural significance. The study employs historical, comparative, and literary analysis to investigate the recurring motifs that characterize Burnett's fiction, such as childhood, moral development, imagination, social inequality, hidden identity, and the restorative power of nature. It also explores the relationship between Burnett's personal experiences and her creative vision, demonstrating how her transatlantic background shaped her literary perspective. The findings reveal that Burnett successfully combined fairy-tale elements with psychological realism, creating memorable characters whose emotional development continues to resonate with readers. The article concludes that Burnett's works remain significant contributions to world children's literature because of their universal humanistic values and timeless artistic appeal.*

Keywords *Children's literature, childhood, moral development, imagination, nature, Victorian literature, literary heritage*

Frensis Hodjson Burnetning adabiy asarlari

Adilova Fotimaxon Muxammad Anasovna
lightliterature51@gmail.com

Katta o'qituvchi,
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Annotatsiya *Mazkur maqolada XIX asr oxiri va XX asr boshlaridagi bolalar adabiyotining yirik namoyandasi Frensis Hodjson Burnetning adabiy merosi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda adibaning Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Little Princess, The Secret Garden va The Lost Prince asarlari badiiy xususiyatlari, mavzuvii yo'nalishi hamda jahon bolalar adabiyotidagi o'rni yoritiladi. Tadqiqot tarixiy-adabiy, qiyosiy va badiiy tahlil metodlari asosida olib borilib, bolalik konsepsiyasi, axloqiy kamolot, tasavvur kuchi, ijtimoiy tengsizlik, yashirin shaxsiyat va tabiatning shifobaxsh qudrati kabi yetakchi motivlar tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, Burnetning shaxsiy hayot tajribasi va transatlantik hayoti uning badiiy tafakkuriga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatgani ochib beriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari Burnet ertaklarga xos badiiy unsurlarni psixologik realizm bilan muvaffaqiyatli uyg'unlashtirganini, buning natijasida o'quvchilarda chuqur hissiy ta'sir uyg'otuvchi yorqin obrazlarni yaratganini ko'rsatadi. Asarlarda mehr-oqibat, insonparvarlik, umid, do'stlik va ichki o'zgarish g'oyalari markaziy o'rin egallaydi. Bundan tashqari, yozuvchining kompozitsion mahorati, ramziy obrazlardan foydalanishi hamda bolalar ruhiyatini nozik tasvirlash usullari uning ijodini boshqa bolalar adabiyoti namoyandalaridan ajratib turadi. Tadqiqot yakunida Frensis Xodjson Burnet asarlari umuminsoniy qadriyatlarni targ'ib etishi,*

tarbiyaviy va estetik ahamiyatini bugungi kunda ham saqlab qolayotgani hamda jahon bolalar adabiyotining bebaho namunalaridan biri sifatida o'z ilmiy va madaniy qimmatini yo'qotmaganligi xulosasi beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar *Bolalar adabiyoti, bolalik, axloqiy kamolot, tasavvur, tabiat, Viktoriya davri adabiyoti, adabiy meros*

Литературное творчество Фрэнсис Ходжсон Бернетт

Адилова Фотимахон Мухамад анасовна
lightliterature51@gmail.com
Старший преподаватель,
Узбекский государственный университет
мировых языков

Аннотация *В статье исследуется литературное наследие Фрэнсис Ходжсон Бернетт – одной из наиболее известных представительниц английской детской литературы конца XIX – начала XX века. Анализируются её наиболее значимые произведения: Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Little Princess, The Secret Garden и The Lost Prince. Особое внимание уделяется художественным особенностям произведений, их тематике, композиции и устойчивому культурному значению. В исследовании применяются историко-литературный, сравнительный и аналитический методы, позволяющие выявить ключевые мотивы творчества писательницы: детство, нравственное становление личности, воображение, социальное неравенство, скрытая идентичность и целительная сила природы. Рассматривается влияние жизненного опыта Бернетт на формирование её художественного мировоззрения и системы образов. Установлено, что писательница органично сочетала сказочные элементы с психологическим реализмом, создавая яркие художественные образы, сохраняющие актуальность для современных читателей. Сделан вывод о том, что произведения Бернетт занимают важное место в мировой детской литературе благодаря их гуманистической направленности и художественной ценности.*

Ключевые слова *Детская литература, детство, нравственное развитие, воображение, природа, викторианская литература, литературное наследие*

Introduction

Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924) was one of the most widely read English-language authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born in Manchester, England, and raised from adolescence in Tennessee after her family emigrated to the United States, Burnett became a transatlantic literary figure whose work moved fluidly

between the two countries she called home (Thwaite, 1974). She wrote prolifically across nearly five decades, producing more than forty novels, numerous plays, and countless short stories and magazine pieces. Though she wrote extensively for adults, she is remembered today chiefly for three works of children's fiction – Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Little Princess, and The Secret Garden – that have never gone

out of print and continue to shape ideas about childhood, imagination, and moral growth. This article surveys Burnett's major works, traces the themes and preoccupations that run through her fiction, and considers the enduring cultural legacy of her writing, from Victorian bestseller lists to modern film adaptations.

Methods

Burnett's family fell into financial difficulty after the death of her father, a manufacturer of ironmongery goods, when she was a small child. In 1865, seeking better prospects, the family emigrated to Knoxville, Tennessee, joining relatives who had already settled there. The transition from industrial Manchester to the rural, war-scarred American South left a deep impression on the young Burnett, and the contrast between genteel poverty and remembered comfort would recur throughout her fiction, most visibly in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*, both of which turn on sudden reversals of fortune. Burnett began writing to help support her family, submitting stories to magazines while still a teenager. Her early efforts appeared in periodicals such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Scribner's Monthly*, and by her early twenties she was earning a reliable income from her fiction – a rare achievement for a young woman writer of the period Bixler, Phyllis (Bixler, 1984). This early apprenticeship in the magazine trade shaped her lifelong habits: fast, disciplined composition, a strong sense of plot and pacing, and an instinct for the kind of sentimental, morally resonant storytelling that Victorian and Edwardian readers prized. Burnett's first major success as a novelist came with *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877), a story set among Lancashire mill and mining communities. Written in a painstakingly rendered Lancashire dialect, the novel follows Joan Lowrie, a proud and unconventional working-class heroine, and was praised for its unsentimental portrayal of industrial life. The book established Burnett's reputation in both Britain and America and demonstrated a social conscience that would

surface again and again in her writing, even as her later fame came to rest more on children's stories. Throughout the 1870s, 1880s, and beyond, Burnett continued to write novels aimed at adult readers, including *Haworth's* (1879), *Louisiana* (1880), *A Fair Barbarian* (1881), and later works such as *The Shuttle* (1907) and *T. Tembarom* (1913). These novels often explore the friction between American directness and British formality, between old aristocratic order and new-world energy and money – themes drawn from Burnett's own life as a woman who moved between Tennessee, Washington, D.C., New York, and England. The *Shuttle*, in particular, is notable for its portrait of a resourceful, independent American heroine who rescues her sister from an unhappy marriage to an impoverished English lord, reversing the more passive heroism of some of Burnett's earlier books.

Little Lord Fauntleroy was Burnett's first sensational children's success and made her, briefly, one of the most famous writers in the English-speaking world. The novel tells the story of Cedric Errol, a good-natured American boy who discovers he is heir to an English earldom and travels to England to be reunited with his estranged, embittered grandfather. Cedric's innate kindness and total lack of snobbery gradually soften the old earl, reconciling the family and, by extension, reconciling American democratic optimism with British aristocratic tradition. The book was an immediate cultural phenomenon. It popularized a particular image of childhood innocence – embodied in Cedric's velvet suit, lace collar, and long curls – that became a fashion craze for real boys dressed by their mothers in imitation "Fauntleroy suits", a trend Burnett herself came to find faintly absurd (Burnett, 1927). The novel also entangled Burnett in one of the first major transatlantic copyright disputes of the era: after unauthorized stage adaptations appeared in Britain, she pursued legal action that helped clarify dramatic copyright law and set precedents still cited in publishing history.

A Little Princess began as a shorter magazine story, *Sara Crewe, or What Happened at Miss Minchin's*, published in 1888, before Burnett expanded it into the full novel published in 1905. The story follows Sara Crewe, a wealthy pupil at a London boarding school who is reduced to servitude after her father's death and the apparent loss of his fortune, only to be restored to comfort through a combination of her own imaginative resilience and a benefactor's timely intervention. Sara's defining trait is her insistence on behaving "like a princess" regardless of her circumstances – a philosophy of inward dignity and imaginative self-possession that Burnett presents as more durable than actual wealth or status. The novel is often read as Burnett's clearest statement of a recurring conviction in her fiction: that character and imagination, not material fortune, determine a person's true worth. The book's contrasts of attic garret and school parlor, of hunger and secretly delivered feasts, give it a fairy-tale structure wrapped around a realistic setting.

Widely regarded as Burnett's masterpiece, *The Secret Garden* tells the story of Mary Lennox, an unloved and sickly child sent from colonial India to live with her reclusive uncle at Misselthwaite Manor on the Yorkshire moors after the death of her parents. There, Mary discovers a walled garden, locked and neglected for a decade, and secretly brings it back to life with the help of a local boy, Dickon. In the process she also discovers her invalid cousin, Colin, hidden away in the house and convinced by everyone around him that he is dying, and helps restore him to health and vitality as well. The novel is built around ideas that were, for Burnett, deeply personal: the healing power of nature, fresh air, and physical activity; the danger of indulging morbid, self-pitying thoughts; and a belief, influenced by the New Thought movement popular in Burnett's own life, that positive thinking and will could shape physical and emotional well-being. The garden itself functions as a symbol of renewal,

growth, and the possibility of recovery from grief – themes that resonated with Burnett's own experience of loss, including the death of her son Lionel from tuberculosis in 1890.

Initially a modest success compared to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *The Secret Garden* steadily grew in critical and popular esteem over the twentieth century and is now considered a landmark of children's literature, admired for its psychological depth, its vivid rendering of the Yorkshire landscape, and its relatively unsentimental treatment of childhood grief and recovery. Beyond her three best-known children's books, Burnett produced a substantial body of other fiction (Carpenter, 1990). *Editha's Burglar* (1888) and *Sara Crewe* were among her popular shorter works for young readers. *The Lost Prince* (1915) follows a poor boy in London drawn into a scheme to restore a fictional European monarchy, reflecting Burnett's ongoing interest in themes of hidden royal identity and the transformative power of belief and imagination – a pattern established in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and echoed throughout her career. In *My Robin* (1912), Burnett revisited the world of *The Secret Garden* in a brief autobiographical essay about a robin who inspired part of the novel's imagery (Gerzina, 2004).

Burnett was also a successful playwright, adapting several of her own novels for the stage, including *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Her plays were performed to large audiences in both London and New York, and her firsthand experience of the theatrical marketplace informed both her prose style – often praised for its vivid, scene-based construction – and her later fights over dramatic copyright. Several themes recur across Burnett's body of work, regardless of whether a given book was aimed at children or adults (Greene, 1995):

- Reversal of fortune and hidden identity: Cedric's sudden elevation to an earldom, Sara Crewe's fall into poverty and eventual rescue, and the disguised prince of *The Lost Prince* all dramatize sudden

shifts in social and material circumstance, testing whether a character's inner worth survives the change.

- The healing power of nature and activity: Misselthwaite's garden, the Yorkshire moors, and Dickon's easy communion with animals all embody Burnett's conviction that contact with the natural world restores both body and spirit.
- The power of imagination and attitude: Sara Crewe's insistence on inward dignity and Colin Craven's transformation once he stops believing himself doomed both reflect Burnett's interest, sharpened by her engagement with New Thought philosophy, in the idea that belief and mental attitude have real, even physical, consequences.
- Reconciliation across social and national divides: Little Lord Fauntleroy's reconciliation of American and British sensibilities, and The Shuttle's marriage of American energy to English tradition, reflect Burnett's own transatlantic life and her interest in bridging old-world hierarchy with new-world democratic optimism.

Neglected or unloved children finding belonging: Mary Lennox, Sara Crewe, and Cedric Errol are each, in different ways, children who begin isolated or unappreciated and move toward found family and community – a pattern that has made Burnett's work particularly durable as literature about resilience (Ward, Martha, 1990).

Results

Burnett's children's novels have been adapted for stage, film, television, radio, and even musical theatre many times over the past century. The Secret Garden alone has been filmed multiple times, staged as a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical in 1991, and adapted into animated and live-action versions for successive generations of audiences. A Little Princess and Little Lord Fauntleroy have likewise been adapted repeatedly, with film versions appearing across nearly every decade

of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, a testament to the durability of Burnett's core stories. Critical assessment of Burnett shifted considerably over the century following her death. In her own lifetime she was regarded, somewhat dismissively by some contemporaries, as a highly commercial, sentimental writer – enormously popular but not always taken seriously by literary critics. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, particularly from the 1970s onward, scholars of children's literature reassessed her work, highlighting the psychological sophistication of The Secret Garden, the proto-feminist independence of heroines like Sara Crewe and the protagonist of The Shuttle, and Burnett's skill in adapting Gothic and fairy-tale structures to realistic settings. Burnett's personal life – including two marriages, chronic ill health, extensive transatlantic travel, her son's early death, and her engagement with New Thought spirituality – has also drawn biographical interest, with scholars increasingly reading her fiction as a working-out of her own losses and beliefs, particularly in The Secret Garden's themes of grief, isolation, and recovery.

Selected Works Timeline

The following selection traces the arc of Burnett's career from her first novel to her final major works:

- 1877 – That Lass o' Lowrie's, her breakthrough dialect novel of Lancashire mill life.
- 1886 – Little Lord Fauntleroy, the transatlantic sensation that made her internationally famous.
- 1888 – Sara Crewe, or What Happened at Miss Minchin's, the magazine story later expanded into A Little Princess.
- 1905 – A Little Princess, the full novel-length expansion of Sara Crewe's story.
- 1907 – The Shuttle, a novel of American enterprise meeting English tradition.
- 1911 – The Secret Garden, later recognized as her most enduring and critically admired work.

- 1915 – *The Lost Prince*, a novel of hidden royalty and boyhood courage set against a fictional European conflict.

Conclusion

Part of the reason Burnett's major children's books have outlasted so much of the fiction published alongside them lies in their structural simplicity paired with emotional depth. Each of her best-known novels follows a recognizable fairy-tale shape – an unloved or diminished child, a hidden or withheld inheritance of status, wealth, or health, and a slow, carefully plotted restoration – but Burnett fills that shape with enough psychological particularity that the stories read as more than formula. Mary Lennox's early sourness, Sara Crewe's stubborn pride, and Cedric Errol's guileless warmth are distinct, memorable temperaments rather than interchangeable virtuous children (Threadgold, Rosemary, 2001). Burnett's prose style also aged well by comparison with many of her Victorian and Edwardian peers. Trained by years of magazine writing to keep scenes moving and dialogue natural, she avoided some of the denser, more digressive habits of nineteenth-century fiction,

producing books that remain readable to modern audiences, including young readers, without extensive editorial simplification. This combination of durable emotional architecture and accessible prose helps explain why *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* remain in print, in classrooms, and on stage and screen more than a century after they were written. Frances Hodgson Burnett's career spanned the transition from Victorian sentimental fiction to modern psychological realism, and her best books sit comfortably in both traditions. While she wrote for adults throughout her life and achieved real success with novels like *That Lass o' Lowrie's* and *The Shuttle*, it is her children's fiction – above all *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* – that has secured her lasting reputation. These books continue to be read, taught, staged, and filmed more than a century after their publication, a durability that speaks to Burnett's skill in fusing memorable characters, fairy-tale structure, and genuine emotional insight into stories that remain compelling well beyond the era in which they were written.

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