

The Image of Home in F.H. Burnett's Children's Stories

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Abstract

*The article examines the typology of the image of home in Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's literature, focusing on her works *The Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*. It explores how Burnett employs various representations of home—ranging from cold institutions and ideal Victorian families to simple refuges—to reflect broader social and moral themes. The study identifies three primary approaches to the image of home: as a dwelling, a family, and a shelter. Burnett's portrayal underscores the contrast between superficial material wealth and the genuine warmth and care that constitute a true home. The article argues that Burnett's narratives advocate for an ideal of home grounded in emotional support and familial love, highlighting the significant impact of one's environment on personal development and well-being.*

Keywords: Home, image, motive, childhood, typological connections, Victorian/Edwardian literature for children.

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1. Introduction

The typology of the concept of home in children's literature by F.H. Burnett is the focus of this essay. The author delineates multiple methods for constructing the concept of "home," following a particular trajectory grounded in the semantics of the English term "home": residence, family home, place of origin, and haven or sanctuary. F.H. Burnett demonstrates that the ideal Victorian family is the best home for a kid by exploiting the collisions in life of her tiny heroines. Key words: childhood, home, motive, image, typological linkages, and children's Victorian/Edwardian literature. Anglo-American children's author Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924) wrote during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The story "Little Lord Fauntleroy" (1886), which has been translated into other European languages and reissued numerous times in England, the USA, and other countries, is undoubtedly her most well-known work (see

Twaite A, 1849 - 1924). The primary methods used to create the house's picture in the tale "The Little Princess" are examined in this article. *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Sarah Crewe (1905) are equally crucial to comprehending the author's body of work. Burnett places a strong emphasis on childhood and places the idea of home at the center of it all. She therefore carries on the traditions of the Bildungsroman (C. Dickens, S. Bronte, E. Bulwer-Lytton, etc.) and the English Victorian novel, in which the contrast home—homelessness, family— orphanhood is not just a plot-forming device but also an ideological and substantive dominance. By examining these tales, we were able to pinpoint various methods for constructing the concept of "home," following a certain pattern deduced from the meaning of the English term "home" [see: Pavlovskaya A.V., 2005; Buzyleva K., 2009]. We think that there are various ways to evaluate the concept of home in F. Burnett's stories. Three of these are crucial to our study, therefore let's focus on them in more detail: house - a place of residence, the semantic

function of which is defined by how well-suited it is, from a social and humanitarian perspective, to a child's life. Within the narrative, "house" refers to a family's acceptance or rejection of a child; it also refers to a dwelling, as defined in the original text, whereas "home" is understood more as a native house, family, or homeland. Additionally, "house" can refer to a shelter, such as an almshouse or refuge. Remember from the story "The Little Princess" that Sarah Crewe, the eleven-year-old daughter of a wealthy English soldier, is being sent to boarding school in London by her father, who is serving in colonial India.

The action takes place against the backdrop of Sarah's interactions with the boarders and Miss Minchin, the school's owner, on two levels: initially, Sarah is a wealthy student, but following her father's unexpected death, she reveals herself to be a servant, a girl placed in the boarding school out of mercy. The story's central theme aligns with the protagonist's life mission, which is to uphold human dignity and continue to be a true princess—that is, a good and giving person—in all circumstances. Mary Lennox, the protagonist of "The Secret Garden," is not as experienced as Sarah Crewe, but she manages to solve a similar problem quite well. In fact, her presence unintentionally changes not only the life of her cousin Colin and the home of her uncle Archibald Craven, where she ends up after her parents die, but also her own. Burnett builds the picture of the house by drawing on the author's descriptions and stage directions, the traits stated by Sarah Crewe or Mary Lennox, and evaluations of supporting characters, including servants.

The primary characters of the stories bear a significant portion of the responsibility for evaluating the meaning of the word "house". The true nature of the hierarchy that prevails in the boarding school where the girl ends up is revealed to us via Sarah Crewe's eyes. Furthermore, Mary Lennox dispels any misconceptions the reader may have regarding the magnificent Yorkshire manor that would serve as the setting for her existence. In the first instance, we are dealing with Miss Minchin's official frigid house, an institution of higher learning. This house will never serve as a model family or a place where its occupants feel at home.

Not so much a haven of refuge offered in kindness as a "roof over the head" for the servants, or more accurately, "a place where you can lay your head," could even be a "shelter" for the abandoned Sarah. Later, Sarah kept

thinking about how strikingly similar the house was to Miss Minchin's. Although it was elegantly designed and grand, the entire setup lacked any aesthetic appeal [Burnett, 1992, p. 149]. The red cheeks of the moon painted on the big clock in the corner, according to Sarah, "had a severe, varnished look" [Ibid., p. 149].

In Miss Minchin's home, the carpet and chairs—which were meant to be soft—were the exact opposite. Sarah notices the heavy mantelpieces, the unusually firm springs in the chairs, and the carpet's geometric, prickly pattern. The original language adds a dark note to the chairs' filling by saying, "the chairs looked as if they were stuffed with bones." The girl, who is happy, innocent, and nice, remarks in her first few steps in this house something that is uncharacteristically accurate in its metaphorical sense: "I don't like it here... but what can I do? Ultimately, even the most courageous warriors most likely dislike going to battle [Ibid., p. 150]. This line reminds us of the heroes from Charles Dickens's novels and sets the tone for the entire action that takes place in the story. It also dispels the reader's initial impression that the story is a fairy tale. The story's negative portrayal of the boarding school's morals gives rise to social issues, and it is appropriate to discuss the influence of Charles Dickens's social assessments in this regard (e.g., "Dombey and Son," "Great Expectations," "Oliver Twist," and others [see: Mikhalskaya, 1987]). A consistent feature of a private school where you have to lie to get by is a fake and hypocritical house. Its gloom and standardness, together with its ugliness and even danger, are emphasized in the original text: "it was a gloomy brick building, just like all the neighboring houses" [Ibid., p. 149]. Victorian-era English educational institutions are known for their callousness and hypocrisy, which are often concealed by the professors and mentors' seeming politeness toward the students. The analogy between the educational process and upbringing and military operations brings to mind R. Kipling's unpleasant, although vivid and characteristic, boyhood experience, in which the educational system destroyed him as a person. However, in keeping with the traditions of the English educational novel, F. Burnett contends that it is precisely these kinds of living circumstances that should help the young heroine develop into a true princess. According to Victorian English literary scholars J. Townsend and B. Qualls [Qualls, 1982; Townsend, 1965], it can be said that in these kinds of vicissitudes of fate, Englishmen are more likely to perceive fate's assistance—the accomplishment of a Christian's destiny—than punishment. As a result, Miss Minchin's

chilly, unwelcoming home serves as both a teaching tool and a focal point for the socioeconomic issues that plague childhood in the narrative.

It is possible to refer to the Victorian house model in "The Little Princess" as belonging to a particular Mr. Carmichael, who resides next door to Miss Minchin's boarding house. Sarah refers to his family as "The Big Family" with pity even though she does not know any of them personally. This trait highlights not just the girl's behavior toward her absentee beau, her neighbors, but also a certain perception of the perfect family that an orphan perceives. The Big Family most likely has plush couches and chairs, and their window-shown red flower wallpaper is a great reflection of them. Their home must be filled with lovely and comfortable things [Burnett, 1992, p. 228]. Like in the boarding home case, the depiction of the residents' mental states at this residence starts with a description of the room furnishings and, like in the first case, precisely matches the characters' inner sentiments. The best colors to describe a good Victorian family's home are warm, bright ones that promote happiness, relaxation, and fun. Because of F. Burnett, the interior of the house is a "talking" representation of the owners' lives; the furniture appear to reflect the mood of the people who live there, and Sarah will always identify this family with her dreams of owning a house. The modest country home of Mrs. Susan Sowerby serves as an illustration of the perfect family in *The Secret Garden*. Although the reader is not allowed inside this home, Susan's kids provide ample insight into the family's traditions, love, and support for one another. Additionally, Dickon, the boy, plays a vital role in the lives of the key characters and helps to bring the Archibald Craven family back to life. Unlike Miss Minchin's dwelling, a solitary and frigid house harbors promise for a spiritual rebirth. This is the home of Carrisford, Sarah's father's friend in "A Little Princess," and it is the grand but tyrannical manor house Misselthwaite Manor in "The Secret Garden," where Mary Lennox initially "felt completely lost" [Burnett, 2000, p. 204]. The absence of the child himself, lost and not yet found (Carrisford's house), or, on the other hand, the youngster abandoned by his parents, is the cause of the loneliness and lack of vitality in such a house. Colin's father, Archibald Craven, is brutally criticized by F. Burnett, who writes, "He left his home - and, wandering around the world, forgot his duty" [Ibid., p. 364]. The author links the reasons for the house's desolation, disease, and coldness to people losing faith in their kids as well as to selfishness and a failure to fulfill parental

responsibilities. The ideas of "family," "home," and "duty" are intertwined throughout Burnett's stories. By denying her adult heroes their families and the joys of life that go along with them, the author appears to be punishing her heroes. The final kind of house is a house, which is unique and was emphasized at the beginning of the essay. A house is a place of refuge and safety. It is connected to the picture of a baker's wife in the tale "The Little Princess". Sarah unintentionally brings a beggar girl who is dying on the street and, in doing so, not only saves her life but also sets up her future at the home of a woman who bakes bread (we notice that this original English symbol is linked to the general idea of the keeper of the hearth). A brief sentence that captures the tiny beggar girl's bewilderment at the abrupt change in her existence is, "She was invited into a room full with bread! It truly was amazing [Burnett, 1992, p. 246]. Bread, a representation of life, the family home, and contentment, takes on a seemingly fantastical quality and is connected to the amazing things that occur to the kids in this tale.

N.M. Demurova emphasizes in one of her prefaces to the stories of F. Burnett [1992, p. 12] that "this is that unwavering, holy faith in the ultimate victory of good, which is sometimes called fabulousness," and that the "fairytale quality" in this instance is justified by the author's ideological position and has deep philosophical roots [Ibid., 2000, pp. 195-214]. Miss Minchin's boarding home, which gave Sara Crewe sanctuary out of calculating kindness, can be seen as a harsh parody of a compassionate haven in contrast to the baker's house. Sara's words, "You are not kind, and this is not a home," are not in vain directed at her harasser [Ibid., p. 204]. Thus, in the former boarder's mind, the haven that was offered becomes a Bastille casemate. "I am a Bastille prisoner." I've been here for a very long time, but nobody seems to remember me. Becky is a prisoner just like me, and Miss Minchin is my jailer. The next cell is where she sits [Ibid., p. 213]. This jail image is related to the mousetrap pattern. Although the girl feels ensnared by fate, she never gives up hope of being freed, occasionally running away from her sorrows and frustrations into the world of her rich fantasy.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we observe that many housing types can be identified in the children's stories written by F.H. Burnett. Her typologies of home in her children's stories reflect her broader social and moral concerns. Through her vivid depictions of various types of homes—whether

as cold institutions, ideal families, or simple refuges—Burnett explores the profound impact of one's environment on their development and well-being. Her works advocate for a conception of home that transcends material wealth and emphasizes emotional warmth and familial love as the true markers of a nurturing and protective environment.

According to this categorization, typical houses include: a home serving as a family gathering place, a prime example of a Victorian home; its antipode, an official school where cruelty and hypocrisy are the norm; a lonely home that a parent or child has abandoned; and, lastly, a home serving as a refuge, where a child who has been shunned by society finds support and safety. Burnett also comes to the conclusion that a child can only have a household where love, kindness, and care are the norm. This is the zone where the youngster feels safe from life's external storms, ready to face the world with confidence in his talents and an open mind to its positive and negative aspects. The author argues that material well-being does not equate to happiness and that wealth does not provide inner tranquility. So, Miss Minchin's affluent boarding school becomes a prison for its students, and wealthy parents who forsake their children are unable to find mental peace, whereas children who are genuine and impulsive in their outlook on life, equipped with an inexhaustible imagination and a firm belief in the victory of good, find their true home in a Victorian family, protection and confidence in the future.

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