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Review of *In the Garden: Essays in Honor of Frances Hodgson Burnett* by ed. Angelica Shirley Carpenter

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Book Review Submission to *The Lion and the Unicorn*

Angelica Shirley Carpenter, ed. *In the Garden: Essays in Honor of Frances Hodgson Burnett*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow P, 2006.

Frances Hodgson Burnett, the author of more than one hundred stories and novels, including three classics of children's literature—*The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*—believed in the power of gardens for growth, rejuvenation, and remembering. As a gardener herself, Burnett spent hours tending to the soil, green spaces, and roses she wrote into *The Secret Garden*, thereby planting the seed that might keep her alive. Now eighty years after her death, Burnett is the subject of an edited collection *In the Garden: Essays in Honor of Frances Hodgson Burnett*, through which contributors remember her life, legacy, and writings. Together, the authors give a sense of what can and *should* be explored about Burnett's work; they stake a claim for continued study of this important literary figure whose texts inspire many adaptations, theatrical performances, historical studies, and critical scholarship.

From the cover image of a lush, green garden with stone walkway to the multiple metaphors of annual renewal, seasonal change, and the curative nature of wild places, *In the Garden* is an enthusiastic tribute to the author of *The Secret Garden*. Many of the contributors presented their essays at the first-ever conference on Frances Hodgson Burnett, held in 2003 at the Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature at California State University, Fresno. Perhaps because the collection grows out of a conference or because contributors are not only academics but also biographers, historians, reviewers, collectors, and even the great-

granddaughter of Burnett, the collection includes a range of approaches to remembering Burnett, some noticeably more scholarly and well-researched than others.

The collection's broad scope is, arguably, its greatest strength as well as its greatest weakness. As a strength, the scope provides an introduction to Burnett: readers experience a breadth of scholarship and learn about (or are reminded of) the range of Burnett's own work: writing for children and adults, with romance and realism, in the United States and Great Britain, for pay and pleasure, with praise and criticism, and as a popular but understudied author. As a weakness, the broad scope might be read as hodgepodge, as a little of everything without sustained attention to any particular thread. The editor and contributing authors work against this potential weakness by identifying gaps in scholarship on Burnett and by proposing future areas of study. Editor Angelica Shirley Carpenter describes the aim of the book as "offering new interpretations of Frances Hodgson Burnett's life and work" (xvi). With biographical, historical, and literary approaches, *In the Garden* achieves its aim and serves as an introduction not only to Burnett's life and children's texts but also to her novels for adults and their many adaptations.

Although Carpenter describes each chapter in the introduction, she fails to provide a trajectory or clear structure for the collection. What follows are sixteen essays, organized loosely with biographical material first, then literary analysis, discussion of theatre and film adaptations, a focus on *The Secret Garden*, and finally more practical chapters on collecting Burnett's texts and joining the Frances Hodgson Burnett Online Discussion Group. A filmography and index provide reference material at the end. Noted historian and biographer Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina frames the collection with her keynote address as the first chapter and her interview with Penny Deupree, Burnett's great-granddaughter, as the conclusion. Gerzina's work allows readers to experience the 2003 conference and to join the community of Burnett scholars and fans committed to growing scholarship on this author.

As the first of two biographical essays, Gerzina's 2003 keynote address, titled "Not Just for Children: The Life and Legacy of Frances Hodgson Burnett," is one of the strongest chapters in the collection. Gerzina shares her writing and research process at the same time as introducing readers to Burnett through the controversy over building a memorial to her in New York City's Central Park. In "A Biographer Looks Back," Anne Thwaite extends this meta-biographical approach and tells the story of how she came to write *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett*. Both Gerzina and Thwaite speculate on why biographers choose their subjects and what processes shape their work.

The next five chapters provide literary analysis of Burnett's books. In chapter three, Ariko Kawabata questions the cult of "the Beautiful Child" and competing images of American mothers in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. In "The Changing Mother Roles in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*," Deborah Druley maintains that Burnett challenged gender-based mother roles in her classic children's books. Carole Dunbar looks across Burnett's texts for children and adults by analyzing Burnett's class privilege and negative portrayals of the urban poor. In a particularly strong chapter "The Making of Marchioness," Alison Lurie proposes three ways to read what is often considered Burnett's best novel for adults—as fairy story, melodrama, and reflection of Burnett's own life and experiences. Angelica Shirley Carpenter then bridges biographical and literary study by speculating on the role that Maythem Hall, Burnett's country home in Kent, might have played in inspiring several of her books, including *The Secret Garden*.

Turning to adaptations of Burnett's novels, chapters eight and nine explore theatre and film, respectively. In "'A Delicate Invisible Hand': Frances Hodgson Burnett's Contributions to Theatre for Youth," Barbara Jo Maier asserts that Burnett's plays for children deserve to be visible and recognized for their influence on youth theatre. Paul H. Frobose reviews early film

productions of Burnett's novels, tracing the creation and evolution of the film industry and its influence on making and remaking Burnett's stories. Frobose's chapter previews the filmography he has compiled as reference material and lays the groundwork for chapter 13, in which Lance Weldy argues in favor of realism in Carol Wiseman's 1986 film version of *A Little Princess*.

The next three chapters focus on *The Secret Garden*. In "Smugness: The Robin in Its Nest," Jerry Griswold explains how the robin's nest in *The Secret Garden* evokes a sense of trust and comfort as well as an absence of fear. Anne Lundin sketches the book's critical and commercial reception, showing how *The Secret Garden* earned status as a classic slowly over time and arguing that readers who passed the book from hand to hand largely influenced the text's staying power. In chapter twelve, Sally Sims Stokes presents one case of *The Secret Garden*'s staying power through its influence on author Noel Streatfield, who wove the novel into her own writing.

Remaining chapters further the collection's range. Book collector Deborah Fox Bellew shares her techniques for locating and acquiring Burnett's lesser-known stories. Diana Birchall describes the creation and maintenance of the Yahoo discussion group dedicated to Burnett, which began after the 2003 conference and has helped to sustain interest in her books. Finally, in chapter sixteen, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina interviews Penny Deupree, who describes her role as "Keeper of the Keys" and archivist of her great-grandmother's materials. Deupree concludes by inviting readers into the work of remembering Burnett: "I'm no longer the only keeper" (230).

As with any edited collection, the quality of these essays varies, with some exceptionally well-researched and analytical and with others more descriptive and expository in nature. I found myself most engaged in the section on *The Secret Garden*, especially as Griswold and Lundin dive deeply into the novel's images and reception, making original arguments about the book's importance over time and in the field of children's literature. In general, what might have helped

the collection would have been groupings around theme or approach (for example, chapters organized into sections of biography, literary analysis, case study, historical sketches, and practical pieces). I would have liked a more clearly defined trajectory for the collection, building connections among the essays and with the study of Frances Hodgson Burnett as a literary figure.

When I consider the broad scope this collection achieves, the one missing element (in my mind) is pedagogical. What role might Burnett's texts play in contemporary K-12 and college classrooms? How are instructors teaching Burnett's writings and legacy? And what is the role of Burnett's work in the study of children's and adolescent literature? Carpenter has assembled an impressive range of research on Burnett, but this collection neglects teaching, a subject likely of interest to many readers of its target audience.

In the Garden: Essays in Honor of Frances Hodgson Burnett achieves its aim of restoring the garden—of keeping scholarship on Burnett alive and growing. Readers are sure to take away a new appreciation for Burnett's contributions not only to children's and adolescent literature but also to the literary world as a whole. Rather than focusing on a limited canon, authors look at the breadth of Burnett's work, and as they do so, they also offer passionate reflections and tributes to an author who has touched many lives over time. I appreciate that contributors to *In the Garden* write not only as researchers and professionals, but also as readers and fans of Burnett who share a love for her texts that grows out childhood reading experiences. Like an old-fashioned country garden with an eclectic mixture of flowers, *In the Garden* invites wandering through new terrain. Readers who do wander in will not be disappointed, as the authors' passion and research help to keep Burnett's work visible and in bloom.

Beth Godbee is a doctoral student in composition and rhetoric at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she is currently researching disciplinary approaches to children's and adolescent literature through an ALAN Foundation Research Grant.