

2-24-2012

Tales of Empire: Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature

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Tales of Empire:
Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts in Humanities
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Date of Approval:
February 24, 2012

Colonialism, Victorian, Fantasy, Alice in Wonderland, Goblin Market, Secret Garden

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Abstract

Children's literature often does not hold the same weight in the studies of a culture as its big brother, the novel. However, as children's literature is written by adults, to convey information which is important for a child to learn in order to be a functioning member of that society, it can be analyzed in the same way novels are, to provide insight into the broad sweeping issues that concerned the adults of that era. Nineteenth-century British children's literature in particular reveals the deep-seated preoccupation the British Empire had with its eastern colonies, and shows how England's relationship to those colonies, particularly India, changed throughout the period. Beginning with the writing of Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market* in 1859, touching upon the Alice stories of Lewis Carroll in 1865 and 1871, and finishing with Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* published in 1911, I show how these three works of children's fiction mirror the changing attitudes of Britain in regard to her eastern colonies. The orientalism found in these stories is a nuanced orientalism that reflects the pressures of the moment and the changing tide of public opinion.

Introduction

Edward Said states in his work *Orientalism* that the “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions.”¹ For Said, these distinctions were arbitrary at best and led to a socio-political imperialism by western, or occidental, cultures towards “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other,” anything that could be labeled oriental. In Said’s *Orientalism* this is a pervasive evil; something that he claims that nearly every writer in the nineteenth century was susceptible to and which governed “an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions – in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility.”² Orientalism is then a monolithic idea that pervades anything written by Western cultures and even emerges in fantasy and children’s literature of the time. The use of unique fantasy spaces within these stories, and their interaction with the ‘real’ world, invites readings of the British concept of the reality of home as interacting with an exotic other. Said was not far wrong when he stated that nineteenth century writers were “extraordinarily well aware of the fact of empire” and as such colonialism would necessarily color the writing, even of children’s literature, of a culture that practiced imperialism daily.³

¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books. 1979), 54.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Said's theory is often derided as an essentialist monolith that would preclude deeper interpretation of any work of the period which makes use of oriental imagery. As Daniel Varisco says in his critical review of Said's *Orientalism*, "Neither the Orient as envisioned nor Orientalism as envenomed can adequately represent the reality that Said and his readers care about."⁴ However, even Varisco admits that claiming "an argument is essentialist does not disprove it" and that the "profound challenge" of such a theory is in applying it to "human realities."⁵ The pervasive orientalism that Said warns against, while an overarching theoretical framework that has contributed much to academic discourse, unfortunately fails to detail the nuances of human behavior in its broad application. What I choose to focus on here is how the practice of orientalism in specific moments during the height of the British Empire reflected the changing relationships between occidental cultures and their oriental colonies. As the dynamics of the British Empire changed, the Orient, and Britain's relationship to it, was also altered in the British imagination. This same shift can be seen reflected in the changing use of fantasy space in the children's literature of the time. This is a nuanced approach to orientalism, one that shows how the dynamics of the moment are critical to understanding how the oriental and the exotic other are viewed in the British imagination. I am arguing that the evolving relationship that the British Empire had with its eastern colonies is reflected in the orientalism of British literature and affected the use of fantasy space in the children's literature of the time.

⁴ Varisco, Daniel Martin. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2007), 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

The theory of orientalism is not one that has often been applied to children's literature. In *Orientalism*, Said targets many writers of adult works as being guilty of unconscious orientalism, among them "poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators";⁶ however, the writers of children's stories manage to escape his ire. Even literary theorists who discuss the writers of children's stories seem to prefer instead to focus on other matters, such as the connection between the use of enclosure as a literary device and the value placed upon childhood independence, which is discussed in Susan Ang's *The Widening World of Children's Literature*, or U.C. Knoepfelmacher's detailed analyses of the connections between the childhoods and home lives of Victorian authors and the stories they wrote. Even though children's literature is not identified as being one of the genres of pervasive orientalism Said warned against, and orientalism is not a theory often applied by modern theorists of children's literature, as a product of a period that Said considers to be the height of orientalism, one should not discount the analysis of children's literature .

Why children's literature? Children, especially in the Victorian era, are not often involved in politics and care little for the subtle dynamics of empire. However, much as in adult literature, children's literature provides unique insight into the culture of a period for the literary theorist. Written by adults, children's literature becomes a natural vehicle for the worldview of the adult members of a culture to be transmitted to the new generation. Even children's stories written for entertainment make clear distinctions, understandable to a child, which reinforce the morals and opinions of the adults who

⁶ Said, 2.

wrote the stories. As Sarah Gilead writes in her article “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction”:

Children’s literature, like any literature, bears examining from the viewpoint of adult readers. Even its child directed projects reflect the adult writer's intentions and satisfy adult readers' notions about children's tastes and needs, as well as fulfilling the needs of the adult societies to which the children belong.⁷

During the Golden Age of children’s literature in particular, a period roughly defined as the latter half of the 19th century through the first few decades of the 20th century⁸, children’s stories were written for the purpose of entertainment, instead of teaching treatises expressing the “ideals and energies of moralists.”⁹ Karen Smith, who traces this resurgence through various stages, captures this period in her “Enlightenment” and “Diversionary” stages, which deal variously with the reawakening of the fantastic imagination, and authors’ commitment to using it for entertainment purposes.¹⁰ This “delicious assortment of wonderful books for children”¹¹ was the birth of what we today consider the genre of children’s literature. While adults did read and enjoy many of these stories, they were written with the understanding that children would be reading them as well, whereas children were denied access to more adult literary works. However, even in the midst of this resurgence of fantasy, the essential fact that children’s literature is written for “a category of persons who are in the process of attaining awareness of themselves and the world they inhabit” necessitates that the stories written for children convey essential information about the world, their society, their culture, and the types of

⁷ Gilead, Sarah. “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction.” *PMLA* 106:2 (1991): 27.

⁸ Ang, Susan. *The Widening World of Children’s Literature* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 15.

⁹ Smith, Karen. *The Fabulous Realm: A Literary-Historical Approach to British Fantasy, 1780-1990* (Metuchen, N.J. : Scarecrow Press, 1993), 120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

adults they are expected to become.¹² In the Victorian period, in particular, “the young person was not simply an entity to be dealt with for the duration of childhood, but still must be considered as an individual who would eventually become a responsible part of society.”¹³ For this reason, children’s stories can be read as harboring a wealth of clues that shed light upon the real world issues faced by the adults who created them. It would be a discredit to the interpretation of the stories to analyze them as if they existed in a vacuum, separate and untouched by the effects of the culture around them. As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt explain in their *Practicing New Historicism*, understanding of a cultural work, literary or otherwise, depends “less on the application of a theoretical model”¹⁴ and more upon “tracing the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture.”¹⁵ That is, to understand a work of art, one must also take into consideration and recognize the influence of the culture and cultural pressures that existed at the time of the work’s creation.

In this paper I will focus on three distinct works of children’s fantasy from the Golden Age of children’s literature and how they reflect the real world issues of the era: specifically the changing attitudes toward Empire and England’s interactions with its eastern colonies. The first chapter will deal entirely with “The Goblin Market” by Christina Rossetti. Composed in 1859 and published in 1862, this poem reflects the attitudes of a Britain that has had its dream-like image of India and other eastern colonies shattered by violence. Growing concerns over the adulteration of goods in the British

¹² Ang, 5.

¹³ Smith, 105.

¹⁴ Gallagher, Catherine, and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

marketplace by foreign imports, particularly opium, are manifested in the corrupting goblin fruits that are the primary vehicle used by the market of the poem's title to corrupt the wholesome reality of the poem as represented by the sisters Lizzie and Laura and their quintessentially English country life. The second chapter will deal with the works of Charles Dodgson, writing under the pen name Lewis Carroll, in the form of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Published in 1865 and 1871, respectively, these works show a definite shift in British opinion as regards the maintenance and governance of the empire's eastern colonies. Detailing the child Alice's journeys through the alien and exotic Wonderland, these stories show a budding empire engaging with cultures that are increasingly "real" and present as entities within the British imagination. Even as Alice interacts with the 'creatures' of Wonderland, she becomes a living avatar of empire, attempting to constrain the chaos around her within acceptable boundaries. The third chapter will be dealing with *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, situated towards the end of the Golden Age of children's literature during a period that could be argued as the beginning of the end for the British Empire. Published in its entirety in 1911, this story tells of Mary Lennox, a British child born in India, who must return to England and be healed of foreign corruption before she can become a proper, wholesome, English girl. *The Secret Garden* shows evidence of the changing tide of English opinion now focused on the need to purge foreign influences and form a protective bastion of Englishness on home soil.

Throughout all three stories, certain themes appear again and again, not the least of which is the connection between the gender of the main characters and national identity. While both men and women authored the stories I will discuss, the main

characters of these stories are female. Even more importantly, the main characters are not portrayed as infantile girls, but young ladies on the cusp of becoming women. Both Alice and Mary are of an age where one must begin to set aside childish things and consider growing up, and the sisters from the *Goblin Market* are sexualized creatures, ready for marriage and children. This is important to note because womanhood is a “particularly compelling” metaphor for the collective identity of a nation since the “body of a woman is often depicted as a repository for ideology, the nation in miniature.”¹⁶ During the nineteenth-century especially, concerns regarding “the integrity of middle-class women’s bodies,” led to a conflagration between a woman’s health, physical and spiritual, and the health of England.¹⁷ The common trope of a woman being the ‘angel’ of her household, “the domestic goddess who supervises the sacred home,”¹⁸ meant that her relative health, or corruption, would affect not only her own family and household, but, by extension, society itself. As Angelia Poon states, a woman’s “enshrined location in the domestic sphere guaranteed national stability.”¹⁹ That the children in these three stories are not yet ‘angels’ in their own right makes little difference since one day, sooner rather than later, they will grow into that role. Today’s little girls are tomorrow’s wives and mothers, passing on what they have learned to the next generation.

One of the ways in which a woman can be contaminated, or nurtured, is through her consumption of food and other goods. The consumption of food items is another theme that winds its way through all three of the stories I will discuss. Ingestible items

¹⁶ Cozzi, Annette. *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010.), 16.

¹⁷ Lysack, Krista. *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women’s Writing*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁸ Cozzi, 79.

¹⁹ Poon, Angelia. *Enacting Englishness in the Victorian Period: Colonialism and the Politics of Performance*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 26.

can both nourish and poison, and thus “impart certain qualities to the eater. That is, you are what you eat.”²⁰ When the eater is a female who stands as a metaphor for the nation, her eating habits inform her identity, either maintaining the health of the body politic, or corrupting it from within. Since only one of these is acceptable, the normal “model of Victorian femininity” depends on “a careful observance of boundaries and appetites.”²¹ A proper girl should only eat that which is good and wholesome, and by that definition, English. At the same time, the expanded boundaries of the British Empire meant that the tempting ‘Goblin fruits’ of other cultures were well within reach. As Annette Cozzi points out in her book *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*,

As confining her to the hearth and allowing her sovereignty over the domestic was one way to control woman and limit her world, food was one way to initiate women into – or at least associate them with – a global imperial culture.²²

However, as Dr. Cozzi goes on to clarify, such associations were rarely positive. As the embodiment of English national identity, the proper Englishwoman must guard at all times against contamination by foreign elements.²³ This is written as both a warning and a cure in these stories. In *The Goblin Market*, Laura eats the exotic goblin fruit and becomes poisoned with longing for more, whereas Mary in *The Secret Garden* must eat good, wholesome British food in order to be healed of the corruption she brings back to England with her from India.

Finally, the shifting use of the fantasy spaces of the stories themselves is another theme that highlights the shifting attitudes regarding colonialism and the exotic other in

²⁰ Daniel, Carolyn. *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children’s Literature*. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 25.

²¹ Lysack, 11.

²² Cozzi, 97.

²³ Cozzi, 98.

Victorian consciousness. With the resurgence of the “fantastic ideal” in children’s stories came a focus on separate fantasy locations that are quite common throughout the Golden Age of children’s literature. Entire fantastic landscapes were conceived, places marked by magic and other fantasy elements and inhabited by strange creatures and governed by their own rules and geography. These spaces are distinct creations, removed from both reality as we know it and the reality of the story within which they are created. All three of the authors I analyze make use of this separate metaphysical space within their stories. These unique locations allow them to remove their main characters from the real world and sets up a dialectic which allows aspects of both the real and the imagined locations of the stories to inform the meanings of the works. In some stories, this location serves as a stand in for the exotic other, either intruding dangerously into the ‘real’ British world, as the *Goblin Market* does, or negotiating with the imperial ambassador, Alice. However a definite shift can be seen throughout the period in the use and meaning of this space. In *The Secret Garden* it is the real world that is corrupted by foreign influence, and it is the fantasy space of the Garden itself that must serve as a bastion and protection against such influence. It is only by retreating to the garden, metaphorically back to England and traditional British values, that Mary can be saved. In the fifty or so years which pass between *The Goblin Market* and *The Secret Garden*, the use of fantasy space has been turned on its head, reflecting a shifting British consciousness which views the exotic other and the empire’s eastern colonies first as violent and dangerous, then as a chaotic entity to be regulated and controlled, and finally as something to be rooted out and barred from the heart of England herself.

Dangerous Fruits:

The Exotic Other in Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

"No," said Lizzie, "No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us."²⁴

The otherworldly sense of *The Goblin Market*, with its exotic goblin men and their wares, invites one to read it as a parable, despite Christina Rossetti's own assertion that "she did not mean anything profound" by this fairy tale.²⁵ This is an invitation recognized by many literary critics who reviewed the poem shortly after its publication in 1862. One periodical, *Macmillan's Magazine*, asks quite pointedly: "Is it a fable – or a mere fairy story – or an allegory against the pleasures of sinful love – or what is it?"²⁶ Another, the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, says of the work, "it may be presumed to be in some sense or other an allegory. But what the allegory is, or how far it runs. . . we cannot undertake to say."²⁷ While there has been a wealth of criticism written about the multitude of possible interpretations to be found within Christina's "little book,"²⁸ only recently has there been exploration into the more material aspect of the poem. Or, to echo Rebecca Stern, to see the goblin fruits as actual fruit, and

²⁴ Rossetti, Christina Georgina. *Goblin Market*. (New York: Stonehill Publishing, 1975), 8.

²⁵ Chapman, Alison. *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 139.

²⁶ Norton, Mrs, Hon, "The Angel in the House, and The Goblin Market." *Macmillan's Magazine* 8:47 (1863: September): 401.

²⁷ "Goblin Market and Other Poems." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 13:343 (1862: May 24): 595.

²⁸ Rossetti, Christina Georgina. *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Antony H. Harrison. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1997), 161-162.

the market of the poem's title as an actual commentary on the Victorian British marketplace.²⁹ By allowing the poem its bit of allegory, seeing the goblins as representative of another culture with their exotic wares, we see that the poem represents the intrusion of a metaphysical exotic other into the solid wholesome British world of the poem, selling fruit which tempts the heroines of the poem to “come buy, come buy.”³⁰ However, consuming this fruit makes one discontent with the simple joys of home, poisoning one with longing for the exotic other. Thus, we are able to arrive at an interpretation which shows the Victorian ambivalence towards their once dream-like colonies, and the clear warning against succumbing to the dangers and exotic temptations that they represent.

This is an allegorical interpretation of the poem that was never dreamed of in the time it was written. Despite the complaints of the *Saturday Review's* critic, sensing meaning he could not find within the “flimsy and unsubstantial”³¹ meters of the poem, the fact that a “mere fairy story”³² might unconsciously reflect recent events of their era would have never occurred to readers and critics who were enmeshed in that era themselves. Indeed, Christina Rossetti herself may not have been aware of the subtle influence of her own culture upon her writing. Such interpretations can only be seen when one occupies “a position from which one can discover meanings that those who left traces of themselves could not have articulated.”³³ For study of this, or any, work of art

²⁹ Stern, Rebecca. *Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2008), 88.

³⁰ Rossetti, 1.

³¹ “Goblin Market and Other Poems.” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, 595.

³² Norton, 401.

³³ Gallagher, 8.

necessitates study of the “cultural matrix”³⁴ which engendered it. As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt clarify in their *Practicing New Historicism*, “We seek something more, something that the authors we study would not have had sufficient distance upon themselves and their own era to grasp.”³⁵

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, colonialism was a key factor in determining British identity: painting the superiority and modernity of British culture against the backdrop of the exotic oriental other.³⁶ Trouble in the colonies led Europeans to smooth over trouble at home, because to be European and English was to be inherently apart from the cultures of the colonies.³⁷ However, there was an indisputable fact of British colonialism; namely, that it brought this exotic other into closer contact with the motherland than ever before. Imperial consumption required imperial goods, and the demand for the exotic ensured that foreign goods were freely available for sale in the British marketplace.³⁸ This hunger for exotic goods led to the concern over what this globalization meant for the purity of the British market, as well as British identity. During the time *The Goblin Market* was written and published, there was a growing paranoia regarding the dilution of British values and morality as the exotic other intruded into British identity.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

³⁶ Said, Edward W. “Orientalism Revisited.” *Cultural Critique*_1 (1985): 93-94.

³⁷ Carens, Timothy L. *Outlandish English Subjects in the Victorian Domestic Novel*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005), 1.

³⁸ Lysack, 17.

The mid-nineteenth century was also a time of shifting awareness of India and climes abroad. During the prior century's rule of India by the East India Company, British awareness of the colony was "a dreamlike vision of India as a pliable land of unspeakable romance."³⁹ However, in the spring of 1857 this image of a mysterious ethereal realm was shattered by an event which is "referred to variously as a military uprising, a national revolt, and a native rebellion or uprising."⁴⁰ The Sepoy Uprising, which is just one of many different names which can be used to refer to the event, forced India fully into the public consciousness of Britain, "revealing a country raw with not just resources, but resentment and rage".⁴¹ The once dreamy idyll gave way to fears of violence, and the exotic other "mutated from sensual natives to. . . sinister villains."⁴² *The Goblin Market*, written barely a year after the uprising, captures this shifting awareness in both the misty "dream-like" aspects of the goblin market, which changes from being tangible to intangible and back again, and in the inherently sinister motives of the goblins themselves.

Within the fantasy world described by the poem *The Goblin Market*, the exotic otherness of the goblins and their market is distinct and quite easily differentiated from the simple solid Britishness represented by the twin sisters Laura and Lizzie. The sisters live a bucolic life, measured by the simple joys of home and hearth. However, lurking just on the other side of a metaphysical glen is the threat of goblin merchant men, tempting the girls to set aside their fears and succumb to the obvious temptation that their exotic wares excite. The fact that the girls know that they should be wary of the goblins

³⁹ Cozzi, 107.

⁴⁰ Harlow, Barbara, and Mia Carter, eds. *Imperialism & Orientalism* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1999), 166.

⁴¹ Cozzi, 107-108.

⁴² Cozzi, 108.

and their fruit only serves to highlight their mysteriousness. “We must not look at Goblin men, we must not buy their fruits; who knows upon what soil they fed, their hungry thirsty roots?”⁴³ cautions Laura, who, despite her own misgivings, is the first to succumb to curiosity and engage in direct contact with the exotic other of the poem.

The goblins themselves manifest a hodgepodge of exotic traits, lending even more credence to their representation as the foreign other within the poem. They are “leering,” “queer,” and “sly,”⁴⁴ and several animals among their various visages are of distinctly non-European origin with one being “like a wombat”⁴⁵ and another “Parrot-voiced.”⁴⁶ The goblins are mysterious creatures, playing into common nineteenth century racial representations where non-Europeans were portrayed as animal-like or subhuman.⁴⁷ Even the goblins’ movements are bestial and degenerated, “One tramp’d at a rat’s pace, One crawl’d like a snail.”⁴⁸ All in all, the description of the goblin men presents a distinctly unflattering image which belies the “cooing” “voice of doves”⁴⁹ they use to try and beguile the sisters.

Their wares are no less exotic, the fruits they offer even more fetishized than the merchants offering them. Like the goblins, their provenance is mysterious and varied; quinces, pineapples, pomegranates, and dates, along with several other fruits offered by the goblins, are not native to British soil at all. Even the fruits which are native to England, such as the apples and cherries, are all unnaturally “ripe together, in summer

⁴³ Rossetti, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷ Lysack, 32-33.

⁴⁸ Rossetti, 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

weather.”⁵⁰ It is this very exoticness that tempts Laura on, leading her to speculate “how fair the vine must grow, whose grapes are so luscious; how warm the wind must blow, through those fruit bushes”⁵¹ even as her sister continues to caution against allowing the “evil gifts” of the exotic merchants to “charm” them.⁵² The fruit itself has a presence within the opening lines of the poem, a permanence which makes their “plump unpecked”⁵³ flesh seem very real and material,⁵⁴ but it is the fruit’s secret origin in that “unknown orchard”⁵⁵ which belies the wholesomeness of their tempting exterior and makes even more dangerous their “dreamlike” physicality and availability.⁵⁶

It is through purchase of these exotic fruits, and the literal consumption of them, that Laura herself becomes tainted by the otherness that the goblins sell. Having no coin, she pays with a lock of her own hair, trading a part of herself and metaphorically letting go of her own cultural identity in exchange for what the Goblins offer. In a near orgiastic scene, which plays into Victorian fears of the dilution and mingling of the races, she consumes the fruit, reveling in its exotic taste which is “sweeter than honey” and “stronger” than wine.⁵⁷ In fact, she overindulges, sucking the fruit “until her lips were sore” and she “knew not was it night or day.”⁵⁸ At home, she turns aside Lizzie’s concern with a dreamy retelling of the exquisite joys of the fruit she had eaten, reminiscent of the sensual fantasies India inspired before the Sepoy Uprising. Laura promises to go and buy some for her sister the next night, but all is not well. Even in the afterglow of first taste,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5-8

⁵² Ibid., 8.

⁵³ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁴ Stern, 88.

⁵⁵ Rossetti, 15.

⁵⁶ Menke, Richard. “The Political Economy of Fruit: Goblin Market.” *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), 109.

⁵⁷ Rossetti, 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the dangerous qualities of the fruit are foreshadowed as Laura admits “I ate and ate my fill, yet my mouth waters still.”⁵⁹

Lizzie, who has not tasted the fruit, is “content” and sings for “the mere bright days delight” as the girls tend their cows, churn butter, bake cakes of “whitest wheat,” and partake in any number of other good solid domestic tasks.⁶⁰ The earthy domesticity to be found in the repetition of these tasks portrays an innocent wholesomeness, a realness which directly counters the mysterious dreamlike quality of the Goblin Market and its exotic wares.⁶¹ It is a sustainable, home-based economy, which is directly threatened by the foreign goblin merchants.⁶² This becomes apparent when Laura, having tasted the exotic other, becomes insensible to the simple joys of home. She longs for the night and a second taste of the exotic fruit, but she looks in vain for the goblin men. Much to her dismay, she can no longer hear their “sugar-baited” words⁶³. Lizzie still hears the call, but Laura has already had her first taste of the addictive fruit so the goblins need no longer try to tempt or cajole her.

Laura can no longer participate in the solid domesticity of her normal home-making. She “no more swept the house, tended the fowls or cows, fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat, brought water from the brook: But sat down listless in the chimney-nook, and would not eat.”⁶⁴ She is completely consumed by her desire and longing for the exotic other, inured to the simple joys of home, and she is fading away. This can be read not only as a devaluation of the home values which once held her secure

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶¹ Stern, 98-99.

⁶² Menke, 118.

⁶³ Rossetti, 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

in her “nest”⁶⁵ with her sister, but also as a pervasive longing for that exotic Other which poisons all other values. Instead of seeing to her chores, she attempts to grow her own fruit from a kernel stone she had carried home with her as a sort of souvenir, but it will not grow. Then, when all other recourse is lost, she can only dream “of melons as the traveler sees, false waves in desert drouth, with shade of leaf-crowned trees, and burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze,”⁶⁶ a distinctly orientalized fantasy.⁶⁷

In her inability to coax life from the seed she has planted, Laura embodies the ultimate punishment for a Victorian woman who transgresses. Laura moves through her domestic tasks in an “absent dream,”⁶⁸ and exists in “the sullen silence of exceeding pain.”⁶⁹ Growing “thin and grey” and dwindling “to swift decay,”⁷⁰ she has become metaphorically barren, unable to nurture or sustain life. This mirrors the account of Jeanie, another girl who “fell sick and died, in her gay prime”⁷¹ before she could become a bride. No longer able to contribute to society by reproducing, it would perhaps be better for Laura to die rather than to continue to suffer the ravages of her unnatural appetite. As is, Laura’s situation is the embodiment of British fear that contamination passed on from the exotic other will strike at the very heart of what it is to be English. Unable to see to her domestic tasks, unable to nurture, Laura is no longer a proper British angel of the household, but is instead a vessel which threatens to spread that contamination.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁷ Lysack, 37.

⁶⁸ Rossetti, 20.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁷¹ Ibid., 30.

The addictive qualities of the fruit are readily apparent. The physical languor which affects Laura is very reminiscent of opium addiction, and her gradual dwindling into a thin grey creature blurs the lines between her, Jeanie, and the goblins. This plays into the drug's perceived ability in Victorian England to affect a sort of "hallucinatory sameness among those who used it."⁷² Opium was a distinctly foreign drug that was commonly available in the British marketplace during the time the poem was written, and Rossetti could not have been insensible to the mounting public concern over its use and the imperialistic aspirations that embroiled Britain in the two Opium Wars that occurred during this period.⁷³

At the time of the poem's writing, opiates were freely available in the British market place, sold in various medicinal concoctions, but most often in its raw form, or as laudanum.⁷⁴ As Victoria Berridge explains in her article detailing opiate use in the nineteenth century, "in the absence of other effective drugs, opiates were widely used despite a general lack of knowledge of how the drug really worked." This lack of knowledge led to statistics which showed that

Around a third of all poisoning deaths in the decade were the result of the administration of opiates, and the relatively high accidental, rather than suicidal, death rate from opiates bore witness to the drug's easy availability.⁷⁵

⁷² Poon, 117.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Berridge, Virginia. "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England." *Victorian Studies* 21:4 (1978): 440.

⁷⁵ Berridge, 443.

Concern over the use of opiates, and the frequent adulteration of the drug with even less wholesome materials, grew to such a degree throughout the 1850s and 60s that it finally engendered the Pharmacy Act of 1868, which provided much needed regulation.⁷⁶

However, such regulation was to come too late to one close to Christina Rossetti. In 1862, as *The Goblin Market* was undergoing final editing for publication, Elizabeth Siddal Rossetti, the wife of Christina's brother, Gabriel Rossetti, and an intimate of her circle, died from an overdose of laudanum. With a restraint that barely masks the grief beneath, Christina wrote a letter to a dear friend announcing the death. "Gabriel's poor Lizzie is dead, she died last Tuesday early in the morning, and Gabriel is in sorrow I will not attempt to describe."⁷⁷ Since *The Goblin Market* was close to publication, it is unlikely that the death of her sister-in-law was formative in the writing of the poem; however, it does illustrate not only how prevalent the use of opiates were at the time, but also how quickly the foreign drug could turn dangerous. As Christina's other brother, William Michael Rossetti, wrote a few days later, "The poor thing had been in the habit of taking laudanum for two or three years past in considerable doses, and on Monday she must have taken more than her system could bear."⁷⁸

Ironically, opium addiction of the common indulgent variety was something that in the British mindset only plagued debauched foreigners, despite the hundreds of thousands of pounds of Turkish opium which was being imported into England in the early eighteenth hundreds.⁷⁹ Laura's "passionate yearning"⁸⁰ for the fruit, along with her wasting away, can all too easily be read as withdrawal, an addict being denied the source

⁷⁶ Berridge, 442.

⁷⁷ Rossetti, Christina Georgina. *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 155.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁹ Berridge, 438.

⁸⁰ Rossetti, 25.

of her obsession. The fact that she is addicted to the exotic and foreign goblin fruit begs the association with foreign opium in the English markets.

In sharp contrast to this is Lizzie, who still remains pure and uncorrupted by the goblin fruit. Throughout the poem she represents the best of the solid, simple Englishness which stands in contrast to the active and invasive orientalism perpetrated by the goblin men. However, when Laura is on the verge of fading away from these values entirely, Lizzie takes it upon herself to go to the goblin market “And for the first time in her life, began to listen and to look.”⁸¹ Lizzie’s contact with the exotic other of the poem is marked with a great deal more caution than her sister’s. She is “mindful of Jeanie”⁸² and wary of the goblin’s offers. The goblins cajole her, offering her a seat and asking her to “honour and eat with” them.⁸³ Lizzie insults them by refusing to participate in the spectacle of enacting their otherness upon her, instead pragmatically insisting to pay for her wares and carry them home. Stymied by her calm and stubborn refusal to succumb to the allures of their fruit, the merchants turn violent. In a parody of imperialism everywhere, they degrade her verbally and then attack, trying to force her to eat their fruits. This sort of racialised violence plays into the imperial consciousness as the goblins abandon any pretense other than an assault of the pure Englishness that Lizzie represents.⁸⁴

Here we have a distinct clash of cultures and values, with Lizzie representing all the national pride the British can muster. She stands “white and golden,” “like a beacon left alone in a hoary roaring sea” as if she is indeed a lighthouse guiding wayward

⁸¹ Ibid., 31.

⁸² Ibid., 33.

⁸³ Ibid., 34

⁸⁴ Lysack, 38.

travelers back to the comforts of home.⁸⁵ The goblins assault her, “mad to tug her standard down,”⁸⁶ but she will not bend before their onslaught, remaining strong in her Britishness. The goblins try to force her, but she literally will not consume their goods, denying them even as the juices of their fruits cover her. Eventually the goblins give up, knowing that they will not be able to corrupt her, leaving her free to return home to her sister “windy-paced,”⁸⁷ bringing to mind more imagery of travelers speeding to the home shore. In her purse jingles the penny the merchants refused to take, adding the more material refusal to ‘consume’ the goblin's goods to her more literal refusal to eat their fruits. Thus, Lizzie escapes with what amounts to a “free sample” to take back to her sister, while neither partaking of the fruit herself nor encouraging the goblin merchants by purchasing their wares.⁸⁸

While the overt sexuality of the ensuing passages cannot be denied, Lizzie’s offering herself to her sister saying: “hug me, kiss me, suck my juices”⁸⁹ can be viewed as another type of eating; only in this case, instead of eating the exotic other as offered to her by the goblins, Laura is feasting on the pure Englishness that Lizzie represents. The juices of the dangerous goblin fruit, purloined and offered, not on exotic golden trays, but on the simple wholesome flesh of her sister, lose their exoticness. Deprived of the mysterious otherness which masked their ill intents, Laura can now taste that the juice is “wormwood to her tongue.”⁹⁰ She undergoes a violent epiphany where she is “like a caged thing freed,” metaphorically freed from her addiction even as she is compared to a

⁸⁵ Rossetti, 38.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 44

⁸⁸ Menke, 128.

⁸⁹ Rossetti, 44.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

“flying flag” which reasserts her national pride.⁹¹ Later, after years have passed, Laura will tell her own daughters of how Lizzie “stood in deadly peril” to win her the “fiery antidote” which freed her from longing after the foreign and exotic.⁹² The mysterious, alluring, and sensual otherness which marked the beginning of the poem and the goblin merchants hawking their exotic goods is countered at the end by a stanza which proclaims that there “is no friend like a sister”⁹³ and asserts in its last lines a conviction in the power of family ties, and by extension, national identity, to protect oneself against the corrupting influences which the goblins and their fruit represent.

This reassertion of national value and family morality at the end of the poem forgives Laura’s indiscretion and makes everything well again. Having learned from her mistake, she is permitted to pass that knowledge onto the next generation. The morals learned from the tale reinforce national pride and a wariness of the exotic. As is said in the 1862 review of the poem,

One thing is certain; we ought not to buy fruit from goblin men. We ought not; and we will not. The cost of doing so, is too passionately portrayed in Miss Rossetti’s verses to permit us to err in such a sort.⁹⁴

Even the review of the poem which started out so poorly in the *Saturday Review* grudgingly forgives the poem for the sake of this moralistic kernel,

It is satisfactory to know that both Laura and Lizzie were in due course married, and lived happily ever afterwards-- also that Laura used to call their little ones round her, and tell them in sober seriousness of her own adventure and Lizzie’s devotion, as an inducement to the cultivation of family affection and trust. Where the moral inculcated is so excellent and

⁹¹ Ibid., 47.

⁹² Ibid., 50.

⁹³ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁴ Norton, 402.

proper, it may seem ungracious to complain of the unreal texture of the fable through which it is conveyed.⁹⁵

So, we see how the goblin men represent the intrusion of a metaphysical exotic other into the solid wholesome British world of the poem. Their fruit is literally a taste of the exotic: alluring, sexual, and laced with all the promise of the new and unusual. To consume this fruit, either literally or metaphorically, is to make one discontent with the simple joys of home, poisoning one with longing for the exotic other. Laura's first taste of the fruit and her resulting disconnection with the world highlight the dangerous addictive quality of foreign goods and ways. In contrast, Lizzie standing up to the goblin men is a clash of values between two disparate cultures, in this case proving the solid Victorian values to be superior to the allure of any foreign influences. The violence the goblins resort to, in their attempts to corrupt her, shows the dangerous truth which belies the harmless dream-like quality once embodied by the market. The juice that she brings back to her pining sister proves, by the bitterness of its second taste, that the promises of that exotic other are bitter, false, and inferior. The fact that it was her sister who rescued her shows the importance of family, and by extension, national ties, in maintaining purity in the face of foreign influences.

Overall, the poem becomes an allegory of the superiority of British culture standing strong in the face of widening globalization. Britain's eastern colonies, and India in particular, could no longer be treated with benign neglect under the care of mercantile agencies. As William Greg wrote in 1851, "governing them as we do from a distance. . .

⁹⁵ "Goblin Market and Other Poems." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, 595.

we cannot govern them otherwise than ill.”⁹⁶ In order to maintain the “real and mighty power”⁹⁷ of colonial England in the face of “difficulty and dispute,”⁹⁸ Britain would have to engage with them as real and present, if alien, cultures that would need to be integrated into their growing Empire.

82. ⁹⁶ Burton, Antoinette, ed. *Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001),

⁹⁷ Ibid, 81.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 82.

Engaging Empire:
Colonialism in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Stories

*"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly. "I-I hardly know, Sir, just at the present- at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."*⁹⁹

Charles Dodgson, writing under the pen-name Lewis Carroll, is perhaps one of the most widely reviewed children's authors of the mid to late 1800s, and his Alice stories are considered to be some of the best examples of the imaginative revival which transformed children's stories at the beginning of the Golden Age of children's literature.¹⁰⁰ However, reviews of these works have not been limited to this ideal. With several other writers of the period, Carroll wrote in a way which expected that the children of the age could understand more than had previously been allowed, and in several works included politics as either "a foundation of the fantasy" or allowed it to "become a point of serious discussion and debate among characters."¹⁰¹ Carroll himself was well informed of the politics of the time, even reducing the heated discussion over Ireland Home Rule into one of his many logic puzzles.¹⁰² The Alice stories in particular, with their unique settings, unusual creatures, and strange rules, reveal "a fascination on

⁹⁹ Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 55.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, 121.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰² Bivona, Daniel. "Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41:2 (1986): 143.

[Carroll's] part with the imaginative possibilities latent in a 'confrontation of cultures' – the kind of encounter that the imperial experience of the nineteenth century was bringing to the forefront of European consciousness."¹⁰³ Published as they were in 1865 and 1871, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* exemplify the idea of an Imperial Britain actively engaging with its exotic colonies, trying to navigate the chaos of conflicting cultures in the name of Empire.

During this period, the relationship between Great Britain and its largest eastern colony, India, was in flux. Following the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, the East India Company, which had previously been the driving force behind British involvement in India, was transferred to the crown in 1858 by The Government of India Act. This act stated in no uncertain terms that "India shall be governed by and in the name of Her Majesty,"¹⁰⁴ making all Indian citizens also citizens of the Empire. Queen Victorian verified this in a proclamation made a few months later, stating that,

We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our other subjects, and those obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfill.¹⁰⁵

This proclamation also advised her new subjects that they should be assured of the free practice of their various religions, that they should be allowed to serve as officers in the government, that laws would take into account their cultural practices, and that the citizenry as a whole would not be responsible for the rebellions perpetrated by a few.¹⁰⁶

No longer only a resource to be exploited, India and Britain's other eastern colonies were

¹⁰³ Ibid., 143-144.

¹⁰⁴ Harlow, 207.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

now real, present parts of the English Empire, and Britain had no choice but to engage with them directly. Their prosperity would be England's prosperity, and any further unrest would be a direct commentary on Britain's ability to negotiate and govern. Unfortunately, Queen Victoria's proclamation, for all its rosy optimism of India being just another part of England's large, happy family, glosses over the fact that the cultures of Britain and India were vastly different, and any attempt to integrate the two would necessarily be fraught with setbacks, confusion, and occasionally chaos.

This can be seen reflected in the fantasy worlds of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land. These lands seem far more real than the intangible goblin market, as Alice must actually travel to both. Both are separate universes of their own, 'real' in their own way and yet separated from the world Alice comes from. We can see this realness increase even in the few short years between the publishing of the two stories.

Wonderland, for all its presence, is a constantly shifting country where halls become pools of tears at a moment's notice, and movement is more circular and wandering than anything which would happen in a clearly delineated landscape. Looking-Glass Land, on the other hand, is clearly marked out in chess-squares which can be traversed in a linear fashion. While the environments within the squares are still sometimes mutable, such as the Sheep's shop turning into a river and back again, the country as a whole is degrees more solid than Wonderland. In Looking-Glass Land it is quite easy to follow Alice as she moves forward from one square to another, while in Wonderland the reader is often surprised by a sudden change of scene or unexpected return to a previous locale.

Various aspects of the lands also beg association with England's eastern colonies. Not the least of these is the fact that they are foreign lands "populated by beings who live

by unfamiliar rules.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the presence of familiar rituals, closer examination proves that these rituals in fact have little to nothing in common with their English parallels. As Daniel Bivona explains in his article on the subject,

An “ethnographic” approach to Alice's adventures is authorized by the fact that Alice is placed in a world that appears to be, at least potentially, rule-governed, although the rules that give meaning to the behavior of the creatures are beyond her ken and must be discovered by inference. To put it another way, more often than not, what would be "natural" behavior in an English setting is inappropriate in Wonderland; the social codes that determine what is or is not "natural" are very different in the two spheres.¹⁰⁸

A high tea Alice stumbles upon in Wonderland has little to no resemblance to the ordered and measured English event, enough so that the entire operation is termed “mad.”¹⁰⁹ A croquet match Alice plays with the Queen of Hearts is also not at all the game Alice is expecting. Instead of using proper mallets and balls, the implements of the game are live flamingos and hedgehogs, with card soldiers bending over to make the arches. It is also hardly a fair game, with the Queen of Hearts destined to win, and the implements of the game not cooperating at all. Alice tries to compare the game to the one of her understanding, with entirely unsatisfactory results,

“I don’t think they play at all fairly,” Alice began, in rather a complaining tone, “and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can’t hear oneself speak – and they don’t seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them – and you have no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive.”¹¹⁰

A trial conducted at the end of the Wonderland story is just as incomprehensible to an English observer. Although Alice is very pleased that she recognizes the

¹⁰⁷ Bivona, 144.

¹⁰⁸ Bivona, 145.

¹⁰⁹ Carroll, 77.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 97.

trappings, for “she thought, and rightly too, that very few little girls of her age knew the meaning of it at all,”¹¹¹ the trappings do not a proper trial make. The witnesses are irrelevant, the evidence absurd, and the entire proceedings a near farce in comparison to English courts of law. Daniel Bivona’s argument that these parodies of English cultural practices can only be understood as native rituals is particularly apt. If Wonderland is a real country and landscape unto itself, then these rituals must serve a purpose of their own, understandable only to the inhabitants of Wonderland, and thus incompressible to Alice who insists upon comparing them to what she already knows instead of attempting to learn their true meaning.¹¹²

The divisions that mark the lands of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land as separate foreign countries is reinforced by the illustrations for the stories so famously sketched by Tenniel. In the Victorian era and before, the pseudoscience of physiognomy was popularly used. This reading of a person’s face, analyzing its shape and form, was believed to reveal aspects of his or her personality. A clear high forehead was a mark of nobility, while a dark and brooding one reveals a certain degradation of character. This was considered to be an essential fact that a person could not hide and was dictated by birth. While there was much debate over various details of execution, whether a particular section of the forehead indicated a certain moral virtue or not, the principle of homogeneity meant that the overall character and expression of a face could be used to indicate a person’s

¹¹¹ Ibid., 125.

¹¹² Bivona, 146.

various rank in the moral and social order.¹¹³ In the British mindset, as they were the pinnacle of all which is good and noble in the world, all other cultures, especially non-European ones, were inferior in both nobility and morality. This was a key component of colonial discourse, as explained by Homi Bhabha, who states that it was used “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.”¹¹⁴ Thus advertisements, cartoons, and illustrations that portrayed the natives of another land regularly portrayed them as almost subhuman, brutal creatures. It was also not uncommon to see them portrayed with animalistic features, as physiognomy has some of its roots in assigning certain animals with certain moral traits, and thus humans who display similar animalistic physical traits also possess those primitive and degraded morals.¹¹⁵ Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land are both populated by a host of animal-like creatures, and even the more human characters, such as the Queen of Hearts and the “savage”¹¹⁶ Duchess, are shown in Tenniel’s illustrations to have heavy, ugly, and brutish features.¹¹⁷ This is a stark contrast to Alice, who is portrayed throughout the illustrations of both books as an ideal Victorian child, with blond hair, a high forehead, and smooth features.¹¹⁸ To a citizenry accustomed to the way the natives of Britain’s various colonies were portrayed, the clear conclusion is that Alice is the only proper human in the stories, and the

¹¹³ “The First Principle of Physiognomy.” *Cornhill Magazine* 4:23 (1861:November): 569-581.

¹¹⁴ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1994), 101.

¹¹⁵ “Phases of Physiognomy.” *Dublin University Magazine* 68:406 (1866:October): 468.

¹¹⁶ Carroll, 103.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70, 94, 99, 104.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38, 45, 73, 96, 104, 117, 136, 141, 168, 172, 186, 203, 210, 234, 235, 253.

various inhabitants of the fantasy landscapes are degenerated examples of everything that is not British.

The concept of identity, then, becomes key to understanding these stories. If Alice herself represents Britain and her Empire in these interactions with the exotic creatures and lands she encounters, then it is an Empire whose identity is continually in flux. Indeed, one of the first things to occur to her after she falls into the rabbit hole and “right *through* the earth”¹¹⁹ is a change in her pure, wholesome British appearance. Unable to navigate this landscape as she is, she submits to a change by drinking an unknown substance which she is only sure is not poison. The physical growth and shrinking she experiences over the next few chapters becomes much more dire than a mere physical alteration, and threaten her sense of self as well,

“Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’”¹²⁰

This echoes a question put to her directly by perhaps the most orientalized character, with his enigmatic ways and hookah, the Caterpillar. Angered, Alice demands of the Caterpillar, “I think you ought to tell me who *you* are, first” only to be stymied by the entirely reasonable retort, “Why?”¹²¹ In Wonderland, Alice is the interloper and cannot make demands from anything but from a position of power, something she does not always possess for all that she struggles to obtain and maintain such a position. For Alice, names are “impersonal categories, useful only insofar as they give power to those who

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

¹²¹ Ibid., 56.

know the names,”¹²² except her own lack of solid identity stymies her attempts to categorize what she finds around her.

It is telling that the scene in both stories which portrays the most harmony and companionship is one where identity is removed as a factor entirely,

“What do you call yourself? The Fawn said at last. Such a soft sweet voice it had! “I wish I knew!” thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, “Nothing, just now.” “Think again,” it said: “that won’t do.” Alice thought, but nothing came of it. “Please, would you tell me what you call yourself?” she said timidly. “I think that might help a little.”¹²³

This is a very different conversation than the one Alice had with the Caterpillar previously. Having both forgotten who they are, Alice and the Fawn are able to interact with each other as blank slates, neither working under the assumptions of preconceived judgments. Alice herself is timid and polite, saying “please” instead of demanding. They move through the forest together, Alice with “her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn.”¹²⁴ Figuratively, all barriers between Imperial Britain, and that which is not Britain, have been abolished.¹²⁵ Unfortunately, this companionship is not to last, for as soon as identity returns, at the edge of the wood, the Fawn remembers itself with a bound of enthusiasm, and recognizes Alice as “a human child,” something which is a danger to it.¹²⁶ Alice herself almost wants “to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveler so suddenly,” but comforts herself with the return of her own identity, “Alice – Alice I won’t forget it again.”¹²⁷ The message here is clear, that it is

¹²² Kincaid, James R. “Alice’s Invasion of Wonderland.” *PMLA* 88:1 (1973): 98.

¹²³ Carroll, 185.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²⁵ Knoepfelmacher, U.C. *Ventures into Childland : Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 204.

¹²⁶ Carroll, 186.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

better to remain oneself than it is to attain harmony, if the price of that harmony is to give up identity. Britain cannot come to terms with India in any way which would force it to compromise what it is to be British.

In fact, it is the search for control over this identity that marks the forward movement in both stories. While Alice's changes in size are initially disturbing and often inappropriate when she first enters Wonderland, she eventually learns how to control these changes herself.¹²⁸ It is also important to note that while she does eat and drink while in Wonderland, what she does eat and drink would be considered appropriate for a Victorian child. The tea and bread and butter she consumes at the mad tea party are "recognizably an appropriate food for a child to eat at tea time within Victorian child-rearing practices," and the 'eat me' cake, while a dainty which would have been considered a treat, is also not out of the norm.¹²⁹ According to Carolyn Daniels, Alice does not consume anything in her journeys which might have been considered "immoral or harmful" and thus "her morality and innocence are explicitly preserved."¹³⁰ This allows for Alice to recognize the potential danger inherent in imbibing anything in Wonderland, and she sets returning to her proper size again as one of her primary goals. In Looking-Glass Land, Alice has learned from her previous sojourn in Wonderland. No longer is the primary goal simply to return to what was, but to obtain greater power and control by becoming a Queen.

Uncontaminated, and with clear goals now in mind, Alice's interactions with the denizens of Wonderland begin to take on a lecturing tone. As previously discussed, Alice

¹²⁸ Daniel, 51.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

refuses to recognize the events around her for what they are, and instead insists on what they should be. In this way she appoints herself as an educator, attempting to impress her own morals and methods upon the denizens of Wonderland. This attitude echoes the prevailing attitude of the time that it was Britain's responsibility to educate the citizens of their colonies. As stated in an article written in 1860 upon the subject, "The Hindoo [sic] is now our fellow-subject, and more than ever demands our serious attention to his intellectual, moral, and religious cultivation."¹³¹ Despite the fact that India had been accepted as full members of the empire, England had yet to win over the minds and hearts of her populace. According to prevailing wisdom of the time, "Education alone can do this."¹³²

Alice demonstrates similar concern for the well-being of the denizens of Wonderland, if in a pedantic sort of way. She is overly concerned for the Duchess's son, and his "precious" nose, and dares not leave the child when she departs.¹³³ "They're sure to kill it in a day or two," she thinks to herself, "wouldn't it be murder to leave it behind?"¹³⁴ In Alice's mindset, it is better to remove a child from his parent and what she perceives as a violent environment, although no one is actually harmed, than it is to try and understand the family dynamic. Alice's concern is fleeting, though, as she is more than happy enough to abandon the child as soon as it proves itself to be a pig, just another animalistic denizen of the country. She continues in the role of educator, often upbraiding the creatures she meets, and "reproaching them for their transgressions" of behavior.¹³⁵

¹³¹ "Education in India: a Letter from the ex-Principal of an Indian Government College to his appointed Successor." *Critic* 21:535 (1860:October 6): 420.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Carroll, 70-73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Daniel, 49.

“You should not make personal remarks” she tells the Hatter with the tone of a parent reprimanding a child, “it’s very rude.”¹³⁶ No one in Wonderland is exempt, even the Queen of Hearts herself. “Nonsense!” Alice declares the first time the Queen orders her execution, effectively silencing the Queen as if she were a child in the midst of a temper tantrum.¹³⁷ One is left with the impression that Alice is the only adult in Wonderland, despite her age. This mirrors the paternalistic attitude England persisted in maintaining throughout the period, viewing her eastern citizens as children needing to be taught and forever needing guidance. However, the desire to educate is one which meets resistance at nearly every turn. Alice is continually frustrated and annoyed by the “apparent desire of the inhabitants to answer brusquely,” not realizing that her continual attempts to enforce the way she feels things ought to be done might be viewed as rude and offensive by others.¹³⁸

Ironically, Alice is given several hints by the natives of Wonderland on how best to reach them, which she ignores. “Keep your temper”¹³⁹ the wise caterpillar tells her, and the Duchess herself repeats moral after moral that advocate tolerance and warn against meddling. “If everyone minded their own business, the world would go round a deal faster than it does,”¹⁴⁰ “Tis love that makes the world go round,”¹⁴¹ and “Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves,”¹⁴² being just a few of them. Unfortunately, Alice, with her superior and narrow world view, does not heed this advice and continually asks meddling questions and resorts to violence when she is thwarted. In

¹³⁶ Carroll, 79.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁸ Smith, 134.

¹³⁹ Carroll, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁴² Ibid.

the trial at the end of the story, she upsets the jury box, insults the King of Hearts, yells at the Queen, and finally degrades the whole proceedings by declaring “you’re nothing but a pack of cards!” which causes the cards to attack her in retaliation.¹⁴³ This is hardly an ideal outcome, for either Alice’s engagement with the Wonderland creatures, or for Britain’s engagement with India. Luckily, Alice will have a second chance when she enters Looking-Glass Land.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the description of the countryside as a chess board begs an even more pointed commentary upon the international ‘games’ played between world powers. As Alice states, “It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played – all over the world.”¹⁴⁴ Alice makes clear that she would like to play, and of course she would like to be a Queen best. For Britain, the only acceptable piece to play would be the most important one on the board. This quest for control drives all of the forward motion in the story, as Alice traverses various squares of the chessboard. Despite Her Majesty’s assurances of equality for her new subjects, paternalism was a strong factor in the governance of India for, it was argued, that “firm direction was needed to prepare ‘backward’ societies for a more liberal order.”¹⁴⁵ That is, India could not be treated with the same comparative liberality that England herself was ruled, simply because her citizens were not prepared, politically, morally, or ethically, to govern themselves. The question of Indian home rule, one of many ‘questions’ which would circulate through Victorian periodicals and the court of public opinion, would be one which was continually addressed throughout the latter half of the 1800s. Despite resolutions passed

¹⁴³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 173.

¹⁴⁵ Cain, P.J., And A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (New York: Longman Group, 1993), 320.

by the Indian National Congress as early as 1885 asking for reforms¹⁴⁶, the question would not be resolved until well into the 20th century.

One of the primary advocates of Britain's sovereignty in India was the leader of the Conservative Party, Benjamin Disraeli. In a speech given in 1872, he is very clear on his opinion that the greatness of England is predicated on the maintenance of her Empire:

“The people of England, and especially the working classes of England, are proud of belonging to an Imperial country, and are resolved to maintain, if they can, their empire – that they believe, on the whole, that the greatness and the empire of England are to be attributed to the ancient institutions of the land. . . They have decided that the Empire shall not be destroyed, and in my opinion no minister in this country will do his duty who neglects any opportunity of reconstructing as much as possible our Colonial Empire, and of responding to those distant sympathies which may become the source of incalculable strength and happiness to this land.”¹⁴⁷

Disraeli was also the mastermind behind Britain's acquisition of a majority of shares of the Suez Canal, a move which assured Britain's access to India and was lauded as a great national triumph.¹⁴⁸ However, one of the acts of legislation Disraeli is best known for in regards to India is the Royal Titles Bill of 1876. Represented as a correction to an oversight in the Government of India Act of 1858, the Bill named Queen Victoria 'Empress of India,' a title she had desired ever since King William of Prussia took the title of Emperor of Germany in 1871.¹⁴⁹ As Empress, Queen Victoria became the Imperial Matriarch, cementing the monarchy's association with imperial imagery.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Burton, 189.

¹⁴⁷ Burton, 132-133.

¹⁴⁸ Mahajan, Sneha. *British Foreign Policy, 1874-1914: The Role of India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Alice's drive to become Queen, despite the many distractions she encounters, mirrors Disraeli's drive to see Britain as sovereign above all else. She traverses a number of little brooks, each running perfectly straight across the land, as if they were canals themselves, to attain this goal, and will not long be detained by any diversion. At the beginning of her journey, she declines to investigate a field of large flowers populated by elephants in favor of attaining the third square. In doing so, she also declines an opportunity for investigating the landscape of this strange country in order to attain a more familiar understanding of it. She makes light of the opportunity, dismissing it flippantly by imagining such a walk to be "dusty and hot, and the elephants did tease so!"¹⁵¹ Instead she embraces the advice of the Red Queen to remember at all times who she is which, excepting only the episode with the fawn we have already discussed, she fulfills admirably throughout her travels. In the fourth square, where she encounters the brothers Tweedle, she neglects to properly introduce herself in favor of trying to learn from them how best to continue on her travels toward the last square, even going so far as to rudely interrupt Tweedledee's poetry recitation. And even towards the end of her journey, when she is rescued by the White Knight, she declines to tarry with him. Alice is cold to the White Knight, a sensitive and compassionate character, by remaining focused on her goal and attempting to turn aside the White Knight's attempts to comfort her with song.¹⁵² She does pause in her journey just long enough to see him off, but as soon as he is out of sight she turns her back on him, flying towards the completion of her goal: "And now for the last brook, and to be a Queen! How grand it sounds!"¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Carroll, 177.

¹⁵² Kincaid, 99.

¹⁵³ Carroll, 250.

This same fixation upon sovereignty can also be seen in Alice's interactions with Looking-Glass Land's other monarchs. The only monarch she treats with respect is the Red Queen,¹⁵⁴ and this is largely predicated upon the fact that the Red Queen has the information that Alice requires in order to become a Queen herself. However, the Red Queen, it is also important to note, is a direct creation of Alice's. When Alice turns her black kitten into the Red Queen at the beginning of the story, she has figuratively invested the Red Queen with her own power by giving her kitten "her own superiority when she converts the small creature."¹⁵⁵ This is a power that she reclaims at the end of the story, by shaking the Red Queen until she shrinks and returns to the form of a kitten again. The other monarchs of the story do not even get the grudging respect with which the Red Queen is treated at the beginning of the story. The White Queen is portrayed as forgetful and slovenly, and needs Alice to fix her appearance so she is presentable. Alice does so with patronizing comments, and laughingly turns aside the Queen's offer to be her lady's maid. She encounters the Red King while he is sleeping, and is informed that she is the focus of his dreaming. This is satisfactory enough for Alice until she is informed by the Tweedles that her very existence is dictated by the King's continuing to dream of her, an assertion which is the only thing in the entire story which makes Alice cry. Alice quickly regains her sense of superiority, however, determining that the Tweedles are "talking nonsense."¹⁵⁶ The White King is little better than his wife in his interactions with Alice, speaking fretfully and becoming faint. Alice treats him as an equal, listening in on his business and taking over his duties as host when she serves plum-cake to the Lion and the Unicorn.

¹⁵⁴ Kincaid, 95.

¹⁵⁵ Knoepflmacher, 196.

¹⁵⁶ Carroll, 197.

Unfortunately, sovereignty proves difficult to maintain at the end of the story. Having finally attained her crown, Alice sits down for a tête-à-tête with the other two queens, a conversation which quickly becomes uncomfortable. Unsatisfied with Alice's crowning, the Red Queen insists that Alice must pass "the proper examination" before she can be a queen.¹⁵⁷ The Red Queen then proceeds to bombard Alice with questions, with the White Queen alternately assisting or attempting to soften things for Alice. The episode shows the Red Queen to have a nasty temper, and she finally declares that she is "Five times as rich" as Alice, and "five times as clever!"¹⁵⁸ However, the Red Queen's attempts to deny Alice prove futile, as eventually both Queens give in to the inevitable and fall asleep on Alice's shoulder as if they were her children. This rocky beginning mirrors the rest of Alice's short reign. She is initially denied access to her own castle, and the merry party she overhears goes abruptly silent as she finally enters. It is clear that the citizenry of Looking-Glass Land are not exactly thrilled to have her as a queen either. In a mirror of the Duchess's advice in Wonderland, the Queens advise Alice of how to proceed. "We must support you, you know,"¹⁵⁹ the White Queen tells her, stating the obvious. But in a final moment of superiority, Alice brushes off the thought that she in any way needs the support of the other queens, or her own citizenry, to rule. "Thank you very much," she replies, "but I can do very well without."¹⁶⁰ It is with this statement that everything begins to fall apart; squashed between the two queen's 'support' Alice barely begins addressing her populace when the world begins to disintegrate into all manner of chaos. As Kincaid describes,

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 253.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 257.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 265.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

The book ends with a wild and disturbed scene of predation, where the pudding and mutton speak and threaten to change places with the guests and begin to eat the eaters. To avoid this, Alice breaks up the looking-glass world and in a final act of destruction affirms her own world of chaos and brutality.¹⁶¹

So it can be seen that the two Alice stories mirror various attempts by Britain to interact with and manage its eastern colonies. Forced to deal with them as equal members of the English Empire, Britain variously attempts to educate and control her new citizens, all without losing her position of perceived superiority. While such attempts to engage with the unfamiliar cultures of India are variously successful, all are ultimately unsuccessful in the attempt to recreate the colonies in Britain's own image. The Indian question, turmoil abroad, and the chaos which occurs when differing cultures collide would all continue well into the new century, when a shift in popular opinion would bring Britain's focus back to her home shores.

¹⁶¹ Kincaid, 99.

Returning Home:

The Healing Power of England in *The Secret Garden*

*“When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle, everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face, and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression. Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another.”*¹⁶²

At the turn of the 20th century British opinion and reaction to Empire were beginning to shift again, and perhaps no children’s story of the period better exemplifies this shift than Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*. Indeed, the entire course of the narrative can be read as the naturalization of nine year old Mary Lennox. Beginning as a “yellow-faced, sickly, bored, and wretched child”¹⁶³, a native of India for all of her British heritage, she becomes, by the end of the book, a proper English “blush-rose.”¹⁶⁴ Along with her cousin, Colin, Mary must immerse herself in the wholesomeness of the British countryside in order to shed the influence of an exotic other that is corrupting all levels of the Empire, even the heart of England. This story shows an England struggling to return to its roots, and heralds the beginning of the end of the British Empire.

¹⁶² Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *The Secret Garden*. (Boston: David R. Godine, 1987), 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

The first several chapters of the book, devoted to Mary's immigration to England, conflate her identity with that of the natives who care for her. Born to a mother who "had not wanted a little girl,"¹⁶⁵ Mary was left entirely to the care of native servants. Ignored by her mother, and abandoned by the proper English governesses hired to teach her, Mary becomes the product of her abandonment, a spoiled tyrannical child who was familiar only with the dark faces of her servants. It is telling that within the first paragraph of the book, the narrator describes Mary as a selfish "little pig."¹⁶⁶ An insult, we are to learn a page later, which is considered among the worst one can level at a native of India, and one Mary uses continually through the first several chapters of the book when she wishes to demean someone. Pig-like Mary is a product of her environment. She is yellow because she was born in India. She is fretful and spoiled because she is denied the care of her British mother and governesses.

This breakdown in the governance of a proper English home was one of the primary evils to be guarded against as the male adventurers and merchants of the early colonial period gave way to families and settled British communities on the continent. The British woman did not 'go native' as the male before her had done, she instead created a proper Victorian home. Despite the employ of "child-like" native servants, she was expected to maintain as well-regulated a household in India as she was expected to maintain in Britain.¹⁶⁷ Within this "restricted domestic sphere" she maintained her Britishness, and "guarded against contamination from native society."¹⁶⁸ However, Mrs. Lennox is hardly a good example of a proper English housewife. Instead of seeing to her

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Burton, 257-259.

¹⁶⁸ Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 92.

duties, among them to establish and keep a proper governess for her daughter, she “cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people.”¹⁶⁹ In fact, she endangers her family and exposes them to cholera because she wished to go to a “silly dinner-party”¹⁷⁰ instead of taking her family away from the sickness, a thoughtless act that leaves her daughter an orphan. It is little wonder that Mary, lacking this maternal protection, is described as having obtained a nasty disposition, the product of her native servants always letting her have her own way. “If her mother had carried her pretty face and her pretty manners oftener into the nursery, Mary might have learned some pretty ways, too,” one woman says of Mrs. Lennox and her dereliction of duty, “It is very sad, now that the poor beautiful thing is gone, to remember that many people never knew she had a child at all.”¹⁷¹ Mary is a product of her environment, as sad as the flowers of her pretend gardens are destined to be, thrust into “little heaps of earth” and wilting under the hot Indian sun with no roots to sustain them.¹⁷²

This conflation of abandoned children with Indian influence is not limited to British children in India itself. Mary’s cousin, Colin Craven, displays all of the same faults of temperament and health. Abandoned by his father at his birth and the death of his mother, Colin has grown up bed-ridden and spoiled. Despite living in a fine house deep in the English countryside, Colin is exposed to the corruptive influences of the exotic other. The author herself clearly intends for this association to be made, for the chapter dealing mainly with Colin is titled “A Young Rajah.”¹⁷³ His picture books are full

¹⁶⁹ Burnett, 7.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 106.

of exotic images, including a “superb coloured illustration”¹⁷⁴ of an Indian snake charmer. His room is indulgently decorated with lush fabrics and hangings of “rich colours.”¹⁷⁵ One of Misselthwaite Manor’s hundreds of shut-up rooms even turns out to be a lady’s sitting room, likely his mother’s, with a cabinet that houses “about a hundred little elephants made of ivory” which Mary immediately associates with the carved ivory and elephants she had seen in India.¹⁷⁶ However, it takes another child who has been corrupted by the same influences to see them in Colin. As Mary tells Colin shortly after meeting him,

“Once in India I saw a boy who was a rajah. He had rubies and emeralds and diamonds stuck all over him. He spoke to his people just as you spoke to Martha. Everybody had to do everything he told them – in a minute. I think they would have been killed if they hadn’t.”¹⁷⁷

While an imperious, unflattering comparison, it is one Colin lives up to by responding, “I shall make you tell me about rajahs presently.”¹⁷⁸ The comparison is also borne out in his interactions with his own servants, confiding in Mary that “everyone is obliged to do what pleases me” not for fear of their own lives, but because it makes Colin “ill to be angry.”¹⁷⁹

The journey Mary takes to England echoes the journey traveled by many foreign emigrants. During the nineteenth century there were no restrictions upon aliens entering Britain herself.¹⁸⁰ Inhabitants from any of England’s territories could move freely within the Empire, and transplants from the European continent landed in increasing numbers

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 110-111.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 101

¹⁸⁰ Freeman, Arthur V, “The Alien Question.” *Westminster Review* 167:5 (1907:May): 539.

upon Britain's shores. However, the prevailing attitude towards these newcomers became increasingly ambivalent. In 1888 a select committee of the House of Commons was appointed to look into the matter, and two measures were introduced in the 1890s attempting to restrict foreign immigration. Both measures failed, but a second commission was appointed in 1902. The report it produced in 1903 generated great fervor and support. "That we have for long been receiving into this country far more than a reasonable share of alien bad characters," states a periodical from 1903 discussing the report, "there is now no doubt."¹⁸¹ Along with concerns regarding economic impact, anxieties regarding the impact of corruptive foreign influences were raised. "There seems no doubt that certain new and particularly repulsive symptoms of immorality in this country are traceable to foreign importation."¹⁸²

The Alien Act of 1905 passed through both houses of Parliament and into law in a mere four months.¹⁸³ The speed with which the legislation passed, after so many failed attempts, seems to confirm public sentiment in favor of the 1903 report. Indeed, the commentary reads very similarly to the modern phrase 'it is about time':

On the whole, the government's dilatoriness may even be accepted as a disguised gain, since the harm that has been done by the delay will probably be more than made up by the energy of administration produced by an overwhelmingly strong case.¹⁸⁴

Placing restrictions upon the immigration of undesirable aliens and allowing for the deportation of undesirable aliens already in the country, the Act was considered to be a

¹⁸¹ "The Solution of the Alien Problem." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 96:2494 (1903:August 15): 195.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 195-196.

¹⁸³ Freeman, 540.

¹⁸⁴ "The Solution of the Alien Problem." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, 195.

great success in protecting native Britain from negative outside influences. A review of the Act published two years after its implementation cites as “perhaps the strongest argument in favor of the Act” the fact that thousands of aliens were choosing to not attempt to immigrate to Britain at all, for fear they would not be accepted into the country.¹⁸⁵ Even more telling, the same periodical lauds the effect the Act had upon aliens already within the country. Fearing deportation, these foreign elements “have taken more care to conform to the law of the land,” assimilating more readily into proper British culture.¹⁸⁶

Mary is not denied entrance to her motherland, but she is certainly made to feel unwelcome. Teased by other British children and treated with benign neglect by the adults who oversee her journey, Mary’s first interaction with an intimate of her future home is hardly more encouraging. “My word! She’s a plain little piece of goods!”¹⁸⁷ Mrs. Medlock, the housekeeper of Misselthwaite Manor, exclaims upon meeting her. She goes on to ominously predict that Mary “will have to alter a good deal” if she is to improve much since “a more marred-looking young one I never saw in my life.”¹⁸⁸ Clearly, Mary must adapt to her new environment, shedding her bad foreign influences if she is ever to find acceptance.

Luckily, Mary begins improving almost as soon as she is exposed to the English countryside. In the carriage ride to Misselthwaite, Mrs. Medlock engages her by telling her the sad story of her uncle, and Mary exhibits her first feelings of sympathy. The tale reminds her of another story she had read “about a poor hunchback and a beautiful

¹⁸⁵ Freeman, 541.

¹⁸⁶ Freeman, 541.

¹⁸⁷ Burnett, 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

princess” which makes her feel “suddenly sorry” for her uncle.¹⁸⁹ Her rehumanization continues at the Manor itself, as she is confronted with her talkative servant, Martha. Mary cannot help comparing Martha to the servants she had been used to in India:

They were obsequious and servile and did not presume to talk to their masters as if they were their equals. Indian servants were commanded to do things, not asked. It was not the custom to say “Please” and “Thank you”, and Mary had always slapped her Ayah in the face when she was angry. She wondered a little what this girl would do if one slapped her in the face. She was a round, rosy, good-natured looking creature, but she had a sturdy way which made mistress Mary wonder if she might not even slap back.¹⁹⁰

Martha, being the wholesome picture of sturdy, rosy health associated with the pastoral and romantic ideal of British peasantry, defies comparison to the Indian servants Mary is familiar with. As is made clear in the passage above, she is a step above, healthy and good-natured, with an innate pride of place which balks any thoughts Mary might have of demeaning her as she would have her former servants. Mary must interact with her as an equal, for at this point in the story Martha is Mary’s superior. Corrupted as she has been by indolent Indian ways, Mary cannot dress or do for herself. Such ignorance surprises Martha, who insists that Mary begin learning. The simple, stolid practicality of the Yorkshire maid cuts through any pretention, and she declares that Mary has less sense than her four year old sister. Despite being ten years of age, Mary must begin again the process of growing up, unlearning bad behaviors obtained in India and learning instead what is proper and acceptable in her new British home.

An integral agent that will aid this growth is the secret garden of the story’s title. Abandoned and unloved, much like Mary herself, the garden represents a safe bastion of

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 25.

pure English values, protected from the outside influences by high strong walls and a hidden door. These walls have symbolic significance, as “Victorian walled gardens were places where gardeners grew young plants” safe away from the winds and other harsh outside elements.¹⁹¹ A young weed herself, Mary first begins to put down roots into her native soil when she hears whispered tales of the garden and its mysterious history from the various servants of Misslethwaite. These stories impart the garden with a metaphorical power beyond its mere physical presence. As Gaspard Bachelard claims in his *Poetics of Space*, “space that has been seized upon by the imagination” contains much more significance than “indifferent space.”¹⁹²

The imagery associated with the garden adds to this significance. Before she ever enters the garden, Mary meets the robin who makes his nest there. The association between the bird’s nest and the garden itself is one that is quickly expanded upon. Afraid that the garden is dead, Mary shares her discovery with a local peasant lad, and Martha’s Pan-like brother, Dickon.¹⁹³ After he assures her that the garden is alive, with good strong roots, he compares Mary to a bird saying, “if tha’ was a missel thrush an’ showed me where thy nest was, does tha’ think I’d tell anyone? Not me.”¹⁹⁴ The image of a nest immediately begs association with a natural, simple home, a safe place in which to be nurtured and grow.¹⁹⁵ This nest in particular becomes Mary’s natural destination, the only place she can return to in order to rediscover the Britishness that is her birthright. As Bachelard explains, a nest is a place that

¹⁹¹ Ang, 122.

¹⁹² Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xxxii.

¹⁹³ Bixler, Phillis. *The Secret Garden: Nature’s Magic*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 41-42.

¹⁹⁴ Burnett, 88.

¹⁹⁵ Bachelard, 98.

[n]ot only do we come back to it, but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest or a lamb to the fold. The sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life.¹⁹⁶

Long absent from England, Mary's nest must be a bastion of Britishness if she is to learn how to be a proper British girl.¹⁹⁷ Her identity, and that of her cousin, Colin, is conflated with the hatchlings born to the robin and his mate. They are fledglings, learning to fly just like those most English of birds.

The mystical aura that surrounds the garden is heightened by its connection to Colin's late mother, Mrs. Craven. As the story progresses, Mrs. Craven becomes a real presence in the story, as real as the garden she once loved. In death, she is a real angel, still concerned with the well-being of her family. "If she had lived I believe I should not have been ill always," Colin admits to Mary, dreaming of the ideal life he would have had under her care.¹⁹⁸ However, it is Colin and Mr. Craven themselves who refuse her intervention. Colin keeps his portrait of her covered with a heavy silk curtain, for he does not like to see her loving expression when he is ill, "hating" her for dying.¹⁹⁹ This sentiment is echoed in Mr. Craven's actions in shutting up the garden and throwing away the key. Instead of embracing her memory and the garden, he turns away from them in pain, abandoning their child in the process. Mrs. Craven's spirit lies dormant, like her garden, waiting for the day when her "bit of earth"²⁰⁰ can fulfill the duty she was unable to execute in life. Her presence is conflated with the garden, and as it comes to life over the course of the spring, she becomes a stronger presence as well. Eventually, Colin

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁹⁸ Burnett, 104.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 94.

leaves her portrait uncovered; now liking to see it because he feels as if she is looking at him “laughing because she was glad I was standing there.”²⁰¹

The garden also represents the fantasy landscape in this story, for all that it is a real location. Its separation from the rest of the manor, maintained through metaphoric abandonment and physical walls, allows it to be set up as the dialectic opposite to the rest of the world. As Said states, “geographic boundaries” lead to “social, ethnic, and cultural” boundaries as well.²⁰² The manor and its child inhabitants are corrupted with exotic otherness, which imperial Britain has allowed into the heart of England herself. However, the garden itself is protected from these influences. Instead of ornate hangings, it is decorated with falls of roses. Instead of carved elephants, it is inhabited by a common English robin. While the children have learned spoiled indulgence outside of the garden, inside they will learn industriousness, and what it is to care for others through “the sense of helping to give life to the plants.”²⁰³

The garden has its own magic, another hallmark of fantasy locations and stories,²⁰⁴ but such magic is not the result of any alien or unknown region, but simply the exercise of the positive effects of the wholesome British countryside upon the children. In a review written about the book in 1911, this is summarized as the importance of “fresh air” and “continual exercise” in the “healthy up-bringing of the young.”²⁰⁵ Even the style of the book is praised as having a “healthy, breezy tone.”²⁰⁶ The complimentary tone of

²⁰¹ Ibid., 201.

²⁰² Said, *Orientalism*, 54.

²⁰³ Ang, 123.

²⁰⁴ Smith, 14.

²⁰⁵ "The Secret Garden." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 112:2,928 (1911:December 10): 10.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

the review indicates that the nature of the children's cure is one that is embraced as what is proper for the upbringing of British children, and one compatible with the mores of the time.

Another facet of the magic the garden possesses is its appropriation of the exotic, heathen magic of Mary's Indian stories and its transformation of it into a magic that is compatible with Christianity. In the beginning, the children themselves are unaware of this connection since all they know of magic is from the stories Mary has heard from her Indian ayah. Later, they begin to use the term to describe the invisible force that seems to make the plants grow, and themselves to become healthier. "Even if it isn't real Magic," Colin says, "We can pretend it is, *something* is there."²⁰⁷ This same something is what begins "pushing things up out of the soil."²⁰⁸ It is not long before stark distinctions are drawn between the children's practice of magic and the magic of Mary's Indian stories. Mary declares that their magic isn't black, but "white as snow," drawing a racial difference in the same breath she uses to affirm the goodness of the magic they practice.²⁰⁹ The same distinction is drawn in the actual practice of the children's magic as well. "Shall we sway backwards and forwards, Mary, as if we were dervishes?"²¹⁰ asks Colin, before the children discard that idea and settle on an affirmation which is much more like a prayer,

"The sun is shining – the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing – the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is the

²⁰⁷ Burnett, 176.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 179.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 176.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 181.

Magic- being strong is the Magic. The Magic is in me – the Magic is in me. It's in every one of us. . . Magic! Magic! Come and help!"²¹¹

Later, once the children have healed enough to be joyful, the gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, suggests singing the Christian Doxology. Despite the fact that the old man had “never seed no sense in th’ Doxology afore,”²¹² he cries at hearing the children’s pure expression of joy in the words and their thankfulness. However it is Dickon’s mother who finally finishes the appropriation. When asked if she believes in magic she exclaims “That I do” although “[I] never knowed it by that name, but what does th’ name matter?”²¹³ She explains that it is none other than “Th’ Big Good Thing”²¹⁴ and it listened when the children sang the Doxology. Even if the song was to thank the magic of the children’s understanding, she puts it all into perspective by stating “What’s names to th’ Joy Maker?”²¹⁵

While the children are being healed spiritually by industrious good work and a practice and belief in ‘The Joy Maker,’ they are being healed physically as well. Not only are the fresh air and exercise important to this transformation, but wholesome British food must be introduced to counteract the negative influences previously experienced by the children. At the beginning of the story, Mary disdains her porridge, showing a stark contrast between herself and Martha’s healthy litter of siblings who are always hungry. Mary doesn’t recognize her porridge as good or appetizing, even with the enticement of “a bit o’ treacle” or sugar.²¹⁶ Mary’s lack of appetite here is shown to be unnatural, an

²¹¹ Ibid., 182.

²¹² Ibid., 205.

²¹³ Ibid., 207.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 29

aberration born out of her tenure in India. “I don’t know what it is to be hungry” she declares, even while refusing to eat.²¹⁷

However, once Mary is on the mend, food takes on new meaning. As Carolyn Daniel states in her book *Voracious Children*, “the notion that eating badly can have detrimental effects on the eater” is logically followed by “the idea that eating healthy, natural food can produce natural, proper children.”²¹⁸ Mary is sickly and wan, with an unnaturally depressed appetite when she first arrives from India, but after a few weeks in the fresh air of the British countryside, her appetite begins to improve. The day she first sets foot into the garden, she pleases Martha by eating “Two pieces ‘o meat an’ two helps o’ rice-puddin.”²¹⁹ This is a benefit also experienced by Colin, after he begins visiting the garden with Mary and Dickon. Soon it is clear that if the children are going to continue their progress towards becoming proper British children, they will have to find the proper food to sustain their growing appetites.²²⁰ This food is supplied by Dickon’s mother, who provides them with pails of “rich new milk with cream on the top of it,” “oatcakes and buns” with “heather honey and clotted cream.”²²¹ They even participate in the manufacture of this wholesome food themselves, making a little oven in a hollow and roasting eggs and potatoes. They arrange to pay for these rustic feasts themselves, sending Mrs. Sowerby “some of their shillings” by way of Dickon.²²² It is only by bypassing the food available to them at the manor that the children can both keep their secret and avoid the adulteration of food in the British marketplace which “potentially

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Daniels, 25.

²¹⁹ Burnett, 64.

²²⁰ Ibid., 27.

²²¹ Ibid., 190-193.

²²² Ibid.

affected all Victorian households.”²²³ The solid, wholesome peasant food they chose to buy is the purest example of British fare that they can afford; and they must “consume, according to cultural expectations of childhood, appropriate quantities of natural food in order to be transformed into natural children.”²²⁴

The exposure to the good wholesome British food in the healthy, natural British air of the secret garden affects a magical transformation upon the two children. Colin, originally a hypochondriac ‘young rajah’ is now a “disgraceful” imitation of a confirmed invalid,

The waxen tinge had left Colin’s skin and a warm rose showed through it; his beautiful eyes were clear and the hollows under them and in his cheeks and temples had filled out. His once heavy locks had begun to look as if they sprang healthily from his forehead and were soft and warm with life. His lips were fuller and of a normal colour.²²⁵

Mary, too, has “become downright pretty” and has filled out and “lost her ugly little sour look. Her hair’s grown thick and healthy and she’d got a bright colour.”²²⁶ Once this transformation is complete, it is time for the Angel of the house, or in this case, garden, to call home the family’s last foreign traveler. Mrs. Craven actually manifests herself, calling her husband home to their now-healthy son by saying that she is “in the garden.”²²⁷ In an echo of Mary’s journey from India, Mr. Craven leaves Austria to come back to England, so that the healing magic of good wholesome Britishness that was such a benefit to his son and niece can be extended to him as well.

²²³ Stern, 87.

²²⁴ Daniels, 27.

²²⁵ Burnett, 194.

²²⁶ Ibid., 195

²²⁷ Ibid., 213.

It is clear throughout the course of the story that what is important is that Britain herself remains pure and uncorrupted. Despite the sprawling empire England controls at the turn of the century, the core of England herself is a primary concern to her citizens.

As one author wrote in the *Westminster Review* in 1909,

When these things have been accomplished: when England has become a nation of communities, who have learned freedom through self-government; when her dependencies shall have evolved, each its own form and method of liberty: in that day it will not matter whether the direct power of England is great or small, whether the English Empire exists or not. England will have fulfilled her task: she will, indeed, be the mother of free nations; the liberator of prisoners; the bearer of light to those who sit in darkness. Whether she is still the great imperial nation, or once more only “the emerald gem set in the silver sea,” will signify nothing. She will at last be truly England; the heart, the spirit, the life of the world.²²⁸

Empire is no longer important; England’s greatness is no longer predicated upon her colonies. Instead it is the superiority of England herself, her Britishness, which elevates her beyond all other countries. Just as Mary returned to English soil in order to be healed of the corruption she obtained in India, England itself must turn its focus away from its colonies in order to strengthen and bolster that which is above all, Britain.

²²⁸ Chapman, A B Wallis, “Imperial Relations in 1909.” *Westminster Review* 173:3 (1910:March): 262.

Conclusion

If Said believed, as he wrote, that “the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority,” then it is not hard to see how he saw this distinction in any western literature that engaged with the east.²²⁹ It is quite difficult to deny that a byproduct of European colonialism was a particularly superior and patronizing attitude toward cultures which were seen, by comparison, to be backward and primitive. However, it is clear by examining the children’s literature of the Victorian era that the attitudes of Britain toward her eastern colonies were not monolithic opinions that remained constant throughout the period. In this, as in all things, public opinion was likely to shift in response either to particular events, or as a natural result of negotiation between national identity and that which could be viewed as Other. While Britain never lost a key component of its identity – its belief in its superiority over all other cultures – the specifics of that superiority, and what it meant in terms of national opinion, action, and policy, were in constant flux.

The authors of children’s stories, like all authors, are products of their culture and must draw upon their experiences of their culture in order to write.²³⁰ The children’s authors of the Victorian period are no different, and so it must be expected that the children’s stories of the time can be analyzed as signposts of the culture which created them. While the impulse may be to hold children’s literature as “sacred” artworks, self-

²²⁹ Said, *Orientalism.*, 42.

²³⁰ Gallagher, 12-13.

enclosed and isolated from the surrounding world, such a privileged position only denies the deeper “social energies” which inform all the artistic works of a period.²³¹ As I have proven, children’s stories are as good an indicator of prevailing cultural attitudes as are the novels of a period.

Further research on this subject is entirely possible. The Golden Age of children’s literature is one in which “the creative author and the eager audience could and would explore the regions of the imagination,”²³² and a wealth of works produced during this period make use of similar fantasy spaces. Whether the reading includes the Neverland of J.M. Barrie, or the imaginative worlds of Kingsley, Macdonald, and Molesworth, these children’s tales invite engagement with the adult reader, providing insight into a variety of subjects which were important to the adults of the period. The fact that the practice of empire was a primary thought of concern for the culture that created these works means that it is highly likely that signs of the shifting ‘orientalisms’ of the period could be located in other children’s stories.

As is, the three works of children’s fiction I have analyzed here show a very clear progression of Britain’s orientalist attitudes towards its eastern colonies throughout the Golden Age of children’s literature. The attitudes shown as prevalent in Christina Rossetti’s *The Goblin Market* are not the same as those which are espoused in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*. In the mid nineteenth century, England was surprised by a bloody uprising which forced it to reengineer its dreamy idyll of the east to include a realization of its eastern colonies as real, as well as undeniably dangerous if

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Smith, 123.

mishandled. Throughout the rest of the period, Britain was in constant negotiation with its new citizens, attempting to maintain the sovereignty of its Empire through education and control. The beginning of the twentieth century marked the beginning of the end for England's Empire, as Britain's focus returned to a national identity which increasingly featured the purity to be found within her own island, and which cast off what had been obtained by their adventures overseas. This trajectory can be seen mirrored in the three works of children's literature I have discussed, in particular in the engagement between the main characters of the stories and the fantasy spaces conjured by the writers of the era.

The little girls found in these stories, near to growing into women and as such representing the national body, engage with these fantasy worlds and discover the dialectic between the nation they represent and the exotic other represented by Britain's eastern colonies. Throughout these stories they learn important things both about themselves, and about the other they ultimately reject. The methods of their interactions reveal the prevailing national attitudes of the time, showing the shift in India's representation: first as a dream-like but newly dangerous threat, to a functioning part of the Empire which must be integrated, to finally a foreign influence which must be tossed aside in order to regain the purity of what it means to be British.

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