

# Metamorphosis in Francis Hodgson Burnett's the Secret Garden

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## ABSTRACT

The early 19th and 20th century were known as the “Golden Age of Children's Literature”. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*, Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book*, A.A Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*, J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Francis Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* ushered in a tremendous growth in children’s literature. Katharine Jones “recasts ‘children’s literature’ as ‘childs literature’ in order to include readers who are no longer in childhood within its sphere” (Waller,2020,p.7). These books and their characters are retained in the memory of every individual for a long time and has a great impact in our lives. *The Secret Garden* by Francis Hodgson Burnett is a remarkable work of art for its explication of the bildungsroman concept. In 1986, Faith McNulty, *The New Yorker’s* children’s book editor, argued that “[t]here is hardly a literate female alive who hasn’t read and loved it” (Kummerling and Muller, 2019, p.158) and emphasizes the beauty in brunette’s novel. Burnett grabs the attention of the children as well as the adult readers who recall their childhood memories. Burnett records the slow gradual and steady progress that took place in the character of Mary and Colin.

**Keywords:** Psychological Growth, Childhood Trauma, Reactive aggression, Maturity.

Children’s books play a major role in the development of every human being. Psychologist D.W Hardings emphasizes “children need books in which they can ‘see themselves’, giving new impetus to the tradition of realistic stories about everyday life” (Rudd, 2010, p.67). The slow progress of the protagonist is analyzed by Bildungsroman. “Bildungsroman and Erziehungroman are german terms signifying ‘novels of formation’ or ‘novels of education’. The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences and usually through spiritual crisis-into maturity and recognition of his identity and role in the world” (Abrams, 1978, p.117). The growth of the protagonist can be analyzed from both the physical and psychological aspects. The physical growth that happens naturally and the psychological growth that has been fostered by the surroundings which exert its influence on them. Developmental psychology helps us to analyze the process of growth that takes place in a child’s mind. Freud, Piaget, Chomsky and Urie Bronfenbrenner are the great pioneers in the field of developmental psychology. Urie Bronfenbrenner's *The Ecology of Human Development* talks about the five systematic growth that determines the growth of the protagonist. It is a nested ecological structure where the protagonist crosses each level to traverse to the next level. Environmental

interconnections impacts the psychological growth of the protagonist. This paper attempts to examine the growth of Mary in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* from an immature and arrogant nature to a matured and kind child with the help of Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development. Bronfenbrenner has evolved an ecological framework for human development. In it he divides the roles, norms and rules which may shape the physiological development into five systems. They are Microsystem, Exosystem, MesoSystem, Macrosystem and ChronoSystem.

Microsystem talks about the interaction of the protagonist with his/her immediate environment that influences their growth. They are bi-directional in nature. According to this system Mary's growth is determined by the interaction between Mary and her parents, her ayah and the clergyman. In the process of the development of a child, a mother plays a major part. Most of the time a child seeks her mother in childhood. Mary Lennox, the protagonist of the novel *The Secret Garden*, lacks the affections of her parents. Being a 6 year old child she longs for her mother's affection. Slowly her longingness evolves into a hatred towards her mother. Mary underwent the process of 'Resistant Attachment' in which the infant feels insecure in her mother's presence and flouts to be in contact with her. Mary slowly distances herself from her mother.

She was left alone by her unaffectionate mother who concentrates on her social life. She has been taken care of by her Ayah. Mary framed her own rules without the aid of her parents. Even the decision to study or not was taken by her. Mary doesn't mingle with people, she has been brought up in a lonely atmosphere where she has been stubborn and authoritative. Her appearance creates in her an inferiority complex.

The sudden disappearance of the people around her makes her feel more miserable. Later she learnt of the cholera which took away millions of people's lives including her Ayah. Initially she was not able to accept the newly appointed Ayah in the place of her previous one. She expresses her hatred by hurting her physically. Mary shows a 'Reactive aggression' towards the new women. She is not able to digest another woman in the place of her ayah and to obey her orders. She needs a person like her Ayah who used to obey her orders. She didn't have any love or attachment towards her old Ayah, but all she needs is an obedient servant like her. Later she expects another Ayah to break her loneliness. "She did not cry because her nurse had died. She was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for anyone" (Burnett, 2013, p.11).

Negation of the love and affection from her parents has changed her into a complacent person. Freud emphasizes the importance of the child's experience in its first five years. "In the child's world, much of what happens, happens for the first time and each new beginning creates the nucleus around which patterns of behavior start to form" (Board, 2014, p.25). The continuous change of surroundings directly influences the child's behavioral patterns. He states that the childhood experience impacts the adult personality. Psychologist Mickelo is of the view that parental loss leads to an insecure attachment to adults. Mary's behavior transforms her into an unloving child and she doesn't mourn the loss of her Ayah. She doesn't have anyone except a small snake which she considers to be her only partner. The silence in the house and the mysterious sounds made her shed tears day and night. She expects someone to visit her but her eagerness ends in failure for many days.

The Clergyman saved her and made her stay at his home before handing her to Mr. Archibald. She was not aware of the travel and about Mr. Archibald's house where she is going to stay. She has been criticized by the childrens in the Clergyman's house due to her lack of knowledge about the new place. As discrimination prolongs, it slowly changes to anti-locution between the group and Mary. Mary was not able to tolerate the dominating, high class attitude of Basil and his boys gang. "Go away! Cried Mary I

don't want boys, Go away!" (Burnett, 2013, p.14). Later she haughtily says "I don't know anything about him", snapped Mary. "I know you don't," Basil answered. "You don't know anything, girls never do" (Burnett, 2013, p.15).

Both Mary and the Clergyman's house were glad due to her departure. Mrs. Melbock accompanied herself with her on the train to England. The reserved nature of Mary made her feel bored throughout the train journey. Mrs Melbock tries to interact with her but Mary's replies contain only one to two words. Mary's curiosity develops when she reaches England. She puts forth many questions due to the sudden change in environment. Bacon says "The child's approach is exemplary not just because the child is perpetually asking questions, but because the child is also impelled to test the answers to such questions" (Joy, 2019, p.34). Her curiosity created the questioning mentality in her. She expects her wishful answers to all her questions. She is surprised to see the empty hall with rooms filled with a dim light (darkness like her life). The forest paintings in her room made her feel as though she lived in a forest. She tries to adapt herself to the new place and its environment. The sudden change in her surroundings motivates her to explore the things around her. Jean Piaget the most famous psychologist states about the process of the child's adaptation towards the new environment.

*Accommodation: The individual adjusts to the outside world by changing his/her cognitive organization.*

*Assimilation: The individual adjusts his/her interpretation of the outside world to fit his/her existing cognitive organization.* (Eysenck, 2018, p. 123 ).

The next stage in the child's development is the Exosystem. It talks about the relationship between the protagonist and the extended family that affects the protagonist's growth. According to Exosystem Mary's relationship with Martha and Dickon helps us to analyze her growth. Mary's Loneliness comes to an end when Martha, Mrs. Medlock's servant, initiates to interact with Mary. Mary felt curious when she spoke about the animals. Martha's conversation about the garden and the birds gave her the excitement to travel. Gradually the conversations about the garden, animals and birds enabled a good relationship between them. For the first time Mary receives a gift from Martha. Mary felt a secure attachment with Martha which she failed to get from her mother. Mary has never had a good conversation with her parents, her ayah and Mrs Medlock. But her intimacy with Martha pioneers her maiden attempt to have a conversation with her. This attachment creates an emotional bond between them. Psychologist Berk defined Attachment as, "The strong affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that leads us to experience pleasure and joy when interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness in the time of stress" (Eysenck, 2018, p. 426).

She felt anxious about the closed garden and her devious relationship with animals when she heard it from Martha. She visits the open garden and creates a friendship with the "red bird". She feels so happy in creating a bond with the bird. Mary, an introvert person breaks her shell in sharing her beautiful memory with the bird to Ben Weatherstap the Gardener. Mary shatters her loneliness by spending time with the birds. Robin broke both Ben Weatherstap and Mary's Loneliness. Mary develops a good relationship with Robin the bird.

*I have no friends.*

*I am lonely myself except when he's with me and he asks his thumb towards robin "He's the only friend I've Got".*

*I have no friends at all," said Mary. "I never had ". My ayah didn't like me and I never played with anyone* (Burnett 2013,p.41).

Both share a similar lonely state. Mary develops a passion towards birds, nature and animals after her first visit to the open garden. She even wants to meet Dickon due to his relationship with animals. For the first time Mary shows love towards a human being. She begins to converse with Robin and expects a reply and Robin replies through its whistle.

*"I like you! I like you ! she cried out"* (Burnett, 2013, p. 46).

Mary shows more interest when Martha shares how Dickon cares the orphan - Fox cub and the half drowned young crow. David Rudd explains the relationship between the child and the animal which creates a curiosity among readers in children books. Burnett in her writings exhibits a beautiful relationship between the animals, Dickon, nature and Mary. Slowly she becomes more passionate towards nature, animals and plants. Due to the excitement she plans to visit the secret garden which has been closed for ten years after Mrs. Archibald's death. She finds the key secretly and enters the garden. She was unaware whether plants were alive or not. She spent more time in the garden and had a good conversation with the plants *"I shall come back this afternoon"*, she said, looking all around at her new kingdom and speaking to the trees and the rose bushes as if they heard her (Burnett, 2013, p. 76). Mary's explanation about the garden made her feel so curious. They both planned to have Dickon's help in getting the flower seeds and spade for the garden. *"Does Dickon know all about them ?"* asked Mary to take possession of her.

*"Dickon can make a flower grow out of a brick wall"* mother says, *"he just whispers things out O'th' ground"* (Burnett, 2013, p.77)

Mary felt surprised when she saw the squirrel and the rabbit listening deeply to the music of Dickon. Mary shares the relationship with Robin. Both of them had a similar interest towards animals, birds and plants. Dickon never fails to surprise Mary as she shows his animal captain and soot who stayed on his shoulders listening to his voice. Mary's excitement towards Dickon kept on increasing. He made the garden bloom with beautiful flowers and healthy vegetables. He made wonders using his hands with his animal friends. They all worked together united and loved to create a magic in the secret garden. They took a lot of effort in planting vegetables and flowers and made the garden alive which has been closed for ten years. They exhibited prosocial behavior among them.

Mesosystem describes the relations between microsystems .It denotes the positive or negative impact of the relationship in families. Mary felt sad when she saw Martha's excitement while she was with her mother. Martha's speech about her mother's affection seems to be different because she never experienced any such love and care. Her mother did not show any love or affection towards her. Due to her mother's indifferent nature, she considers all the mothers in India to be the same. Martha and Dickon share their mother's food with Mary and Colin.

Since Mary and Colin have lost their mother's they felt so glad to eat her mother's food. Hoffman explains the 'love withdrawal' methods and says that continuous love is being received by the children even when they behave badly. Martha's mother didn't show any negative response towards the arrogant behavior of Mary. Instead she constantly showed her love towards them. Mary and Colin's longing for the affection of their mother has been satisfied by Dickon's Mother. The improvisation in Colin and Mary's health is seen visibly by Mr. Cravin, The Doctor and the Nurse. They also found out that Dickon's mother was the cause for the children's good health and that they have been rehabilitated. Martha's mother encourages Mary to read her books for her self development. She also suggests a nurse to take care of Mary.

Macro system talks about the culture that influences the growth of the protagonist. Mary Lennox was born in India, she was then brought up in England after her parent's death. In India Mary had an authoritative relationship towards the servant. She has been under the impression that servants are meant to obey orders,

carry luggages and parcels. She expects the same kind of relationship with Medlock. Bandura in his social learning theory emphasizes the observational learning that influences aggressive behavior in children. Mary exhibits a dominant and authoritative and harsh behavior towards Medlock while carrying the luggage. She observes the master servant pattern in India and exhibits the same towards Medlock. Mary expressed a master-servant relationship not only with Medlock but also with Martha in the initial phase. She demanded Martha to do her daily chores including her dressing similar to what her ayah does in India. The unloving authoritative nature slowly changes when Martha establishes a friendly relationship and receives love from Dickon's mother. The friendship and affection that bloomed among them slowly changed her nature.

A remarkable change can be noticed in Mary's food habits also. In India she orders her servant for Food and wastes it if she dislikes it. But slowly she takes up Martha's advice and alters her food habits. she begins to empty the meal that was placed on the plate. Her stubbornness slowly changes when she begins to take up Martha's advice.

Mary compares the 'hot' climate in India to the pleasant blue sky of the Moore. She disliked the climate in India and enjoyed the climate of Mooreland. Mary adapts herself and begins to like the culture and the climate which prevailed in England. The fresh air of the Moore gave her a pleasant experience. She has never been more curious to explore anything in India due to the Hot Climate, but in Mooreland she amuses herself in doing new things, even caring for her surroundings. She encourages herself and her friends to explore much in England. Mary, who never used to come out of her house in India, now likes to wander around to explore new things in England.

John Bowlby, a child psychoanalyst stresses the importance of a mother's relationship with the child. "An infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment"

(Eysenck 2018,p.184). Martha gains her mothers love while Mary lacks her maternal affection. Psychologist Patterson stresses the importance of family in the process of a child's growth. Mary lacks proper parental system and develops an aggressive and stubborn behavior. She compares her unaffectionate mother in India to Martha's affectionate mother. She compares her mother who doesn't even care for her presence and Martha's mother who cares for her everyday nutritional food.

Chronosystem talks about the environmental and psychological changes that occur throughout their lives. Mary begins to behave more maturely and develops a positive attitude which changes her life and Colin's life. It was Mary who took Colin from his shelf of darkness both physically and mentally. Colin is in a stressful state of mind. According to Follaman the interference between interior and the environment creates stress. The psychologist's discuss four efforts that are associated with stress. The psychological, the emotional, the cognitive and the behavioral efforts. Colin is associated with an emotional stress and in the emotional stress he continually questions the physical and mental inability. Colin lost his mother in his childhood. His father also avoids meeting him due to his grief over his wife's death. The lack of affection from his parents created a negative impact.

The loss of his mother impacted his life for many years. Colin, who suffered from 'typhoid and rheumatic fevers made him stay in a closed room for ten years. He also fears that if he grows older he may develop a hunchback like his father. Even his father visits him at night after he sleeps, hence he develops a negative vibe and develops an unwilling spirit to meet people. Maternal deprivation starts to develop in him. Mary upholds Altruism towards Colin. Altruism is one of the prosocial behaviors in which the individual helps another person without any expectation in return. Mary initiates herself to break his mental barrier. She



starts to communicate with him even though he dislikes Mary and shares her knowledge about the secret garden which stirs up the curiosity in his heart. She shared the happiness and the changes which she gained from the garden. For the first time Colin orders his servant to bring Mary to his room to speak with her. Colin, who hates to see people, now begins to communicate with Mary. Colin's negative feeling about his physical body starts to change slowly with the help of Mary's positive conversation. For the first time, Colin opens the closed room to enjoy the fresh air of the garden. Dickon helps him in his wheelchair to visit the garden. The touch of the fresh air gave him a cherished mind. The magic of the garden made his mind to live forever. Colin cried out when he saw Mary's face and the smell of the flowers from her. As a newborn baby comes out from its dark mother's womb, Colin felt the same when he left the room and threw himself into a new atmosphere. Colin started to walk on his legs for the first time due to Mary's positive encouragement. Colin, an introvert, broke his cocoon and came out to fly.

A gradual transformation is witnessed in Mary when she established a filial bond with the vegetative and animal world. Martha and Dickon act as a cathartic force in the psychological development enabled in Mary. Having denied the mental care, love and affection from her mother she develops an estrangement towards the outside world. She betrays her anger, rage and hatred towards anyone who comes across. Her change of place, environment and people had an advantageous effect on her. As propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the progression of Mary from detachment to attachment she traverses the five systems in the development and growth of a child. Mary had been fortunate enough to come across the selfless, compassionate tender Martha and Dickon. Though each individual is independent of his own growth yet such is human nature that they have to be tended with love, care and affection of someone or else they will become unproductive seeds in an arid land.

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