Growth on English Soil: Imperialism and Nature in *The Secret Garden*

Caroline Ann Daněk Kyzek, The University of Trnava

Abstract

The study examines Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden *(1911) through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. One of the major themes of the novel is healing and growth through nature, which is exemplified by the main character Mary Lennox and her cousin Colin Craven. Both undergo a major transformation, body and soul, owing to the therapeutic tendencies of the garden. Mary, in particular, is greatly influenced by the process of gardening and the companionship of Dickon, a boy with a close relationship with animals, who teaches her to grow plants. Mary's own growth and transformation takes place in North Yorkshire, England as opposed to her previous home, India, which represents the cultural "otherness" in a period of imperialism. As a newly developed field in literary criticism, postcolonial ecocriticism unearths a correlation between literature and the natural world while observing it in the postcolonial environment. Both ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism indicate the ways in which culture is always rooted in material reality, and therefore this study aims to examine how culture in the early twentieth century is represented. Another part of the research involves the analyzation of these aspects in film adaptations, specifically Agnieszka Holland's 1993 and Marc Munden's 2020 productions. Munden's production in particular poses postcolonial questions with the changing of the setting to 1947 amid India's War of Independence. Unlike Holland's production, however, it fails to exude the essence of healing and growth with the omission of Mary's labor in the garden.*

Keywords: The Secret Garden, *postcolonial ecocriticism, nature, growth, imperialism*

Introduction

Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* is the story of Mary Lennox, who is sent to Yorkshire, England to live with her widowed uncle, Archibald Craven, at his estate, Misselthwaite Manor, after the death of her parents. With the help of a robin, she finds a key to the secret garden, which she tends to with the help of a local boy, Dickon. Mary then discovers her cousin Colin, a sickly boy, who by the end of the novel becomes cured through therapeutic interactions with the garden. Mary herself changes and becomes healthier through the process of tending the garden and being outdoors in the fresh Yorkshire air, which is different from the stifling humid air of India where she grew up. Therefore, the novel inspires readers, particularly children, to enjoy nature and the outdoors, but in the process, it brings about aspects of imperialism, in an age when Britian was an imperial superpower.

Many British novels written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as mentioned by Edward Said, have aspects of imperialism whether mentioned explicitly or not. Although Said (1993: 14) admires the work of critic Raymond Williams, he says that Williams presents a "limitation in his feeling that English literature is mainly about England." English literature, even indirectly, has remnants of imperialism, and this imperial presence is illustrated by the way literature disregards or magnifies certain narratives. In his book *Culture and Imperialism,* Said mentions narratives like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where the horrors of

colonialism are explicit, but also works like Austen's *Mansfield Park* where imperialist attitudes are shown though what is omitted. In *The Secret Garden*, although the focal setting is Yorkshire, we cannot ignore the significance of India. "Nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of empire, but perhaps nowhere with more regularity and frequency than in the British novel" (Said 1993: 62). Therefore, the postcolonial aspects of the novel are just as important as the ones about nature.

An emerging theory that brings forth the discourse between postcolonial and environmental themes and issues is postcolonial ecocriticism. What this theory does, according to Huggan and Tiffin (2015: 2) is that it brings post-colonial and ecological issues together as a way of confronting imperialist modes of environmental and social dominance. In the novel, this is played out through the fact that England is where Mary is able to cultivate a garden which contributes to her personal growth, while India is seen as a place that hinders this growth. This suggests some of the imperial practices and attitudes of Britain towards India. In postcolonial ecocriticism it is significant to "look accordingly for the colonial/imperial underpinnings of environmental practices in both 'colonising' and 'colonised' societies of the present and the past" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 13). Usually, the focus is on the land of the colonized, as mentioned by Banerjee (2016: 199), when she speaks of Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa who wrote about the "ecological dimension of colonial violence and exploitation" in their home countries. She also writes about Arundhati Roy, who wrote concerning the progress by postcolonial India, which had catastrophic costs for the ecosystem of tribal lands (Banerjee 2016: 201). Although *The Secret Garden* does not look at tribal lands of the people after colonialism, it contains an aspect of exploitation, even if not explicitly mentioned.

The major aim, hence, is to examine *The Secret Garden* through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, and to study how culture in the early twentieth century is represented, particularly attitudes concerning imperialism and nature. In the first part, I will look at the symbol of the garden and the importance it has for the growth and transformations of Mary and Colin, while in the next part, I observe the negative attitudes towards India, especially in relation to England. These two topics, however, are intertwined because it is the garden in the English countryside that heals, which is distinguished from India, a place that supposedly hinders growth.

The final aim is to utilize these postcolonial ecocritical motifs in two movie adaptations: the 1993 movie directed by Agnieszka Holland, produced by Francis Ford Coppola with a screenplay by Caroline Thompson, and the 2020 movie directed by Marc Munden, produced by David Heyman with a screenplay by Jack Thorne. Film adaptations are vehicles of changes in representation, especially concerning the setting, which is crucial in both postcolonialism and ecocriticism. According to Jonah (2020: 38-39), "postcolonialism and ecocriticism seem to converge on the point that both fields are concerned with the idea of the representation of place, postcolonialism focuses on the historicity of place and ecocriticism hinges on the aesthetics of place." I will thus analyze the representations of these films, their relation to each other and the book, and how films, like novels, can exemplify the society they are produced in.

The Healing Powers of the Garden

As a book mainly written for children, *The Secret Garden* caters to the idea of the importance of play, particularly outdoors. According to Crone (2003), this book as well as others such as Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Cicely Mary Barker's *The Flower Fairies* contain wonderful illustrations and forged aspirations to the magic of playing outdoors and exploring gardens. "A garden is where a child first experiences freedom to explore, wonder, daydream and indulge curiosity" (4). Books like this are also exemplified in the novel, as Colin, who is bound by his bed, enjoys the beautiful pictures. Even though the reader knows that without the encouragement of Mary, Colin would never have found the resolve to venture outside, these illustrated books add a sense of wonder and appreciation from Colin.

One of the major themes of the novel is the transformation of the children through healthy outdoor activities. When the reader is first introduced to Mary, she is "the most disagreeable- looking child ever seen" and has "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" (Burnett 1911: 1).[1] She is also described as being ill tempered, which is later rectified as her interactions with other people improve. This improvement is mainly due to the time that Mary spends in nature. One night, she thinks about four positive turning points in her life: "She had felt as if she had understood a robin and that it had understood her; she had run in the wild until her blood had grown warm; she had been healthily hungry for the first time in her life; and she had found out what it was to be sorry for someone" (59). This demonstrates that not only has Mary's appearance started to improve, but she has started to feel empathy which added to her general well-being. Her interactions with the robin and running outside also exemplify this association of nature as nourishing her both mentally and physically.

Throughout the novel, her appearance and appetite keep improving due to her outdoors excursions. After the robin leads her to the buried key to the door of the secret garden, Mary's appreciation of nature builds. The secret garden becomes a haven for Mary, as well as a purpose, since she indulges in planting seeds and helping the garden grow. Her companionship with Dickon, brother to the servant Martha and a boy who is always in the presence of animals, creates a bond not only with nature, but with another being who shares her purpose. This is especially significant since Mary did not have any children to play or interact with before. Animals, plants, and friends who share an appreciation of nature, have truly molded Mary, that at the end she becomes the exemplary character, the opposite of her in the beginning:

> When her mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages crowded with children, with queer, crabbed old gardeners and common little Yorkshire housemaids, with springtime and with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his "creatures," there was no room left for the disagreeable thought which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired.
>
> (Burnett 1911: 344)

This passage from the end of the novel exemplifies all the positive aspects about living in the Yorkshire countryside. Mary even thinks fondly of the "crabbed old gardeners" (specifically Ben Weatherstaff) since they too, are an important part of the grounds at Misselthwaite.

If Mary's change demonstrates the healing power of nature, then Colin's transformation indeed illustrates that nature can be magical. When Mary meets Colin, he is a sickly bedridden boy who can't walk and whose ill temper far exceeds Mary's. However, his association with

Mary and Dickon ease his temper, and as their group trips to the secret garden increase, so does Colin's health. He shifts from "'I hate fresh air and I don't want to go out'" (155) to "'It's planted!' said Colin at last. 'And the sun is only slipping over the edge. Help me up, Dickon. I want to be standing when it goes. That's part of the Magic'" (283). Indeed, this is only one of the numerous instances of Colin using the word "Magic" to speak of his feelings in the garden. There is even something magical about his physical change: "The waxen tinge has left Colin's skin and a warm rose showed though it; his beautiful eyes were clear and the hollows under them and in his cheeks and temples had filled out. His once dark, heavy locks had begun to look as if they sprang healthily from his forehead and were soft and warm with life" (315-16). Most crucial however, is the fact that Colin, who could not walk and believed he would die, turns out (with practice in the garden) to be very capable of physical activities and starts believing that he will live a long life.

As pointed out by Herdiana (2018: 54), there is a reciprocal relationship between the children and nature in the book, since the garden is healed by Mary's restorative gardening activities, while these activities cure her of the garden, while the gardening activities cure her. This relationship is the fundamental idea of ecocritical thought. "Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty 1996: xviii). Mary is affected by the garden the moment she appears in it: "It was the sweetest-most mysterious-looking place one could imagine" (Burnett 1911: 93) and Colin's first entrance is magical: "Perhaps out of pure heavenly goodness the spring came and crowded everything is possibly could into that one place" (1911: 262).

Another aspect of the garden is the symbolic presence of Colin's dead mother Lilias (also called Lily). "The place was a wilderness of autumn gold and purple and violet and flaming scarlet, and on every side were sheaves of late lilies standing together- lilies which were white or white and ruby" (Burnett 1911: 361). The mention of lilies, who share the name with Colin's mother, can perhaps symbolize her spiritual presence in the garden. In fact, she makes up for the lack Archibald Craven's presence, whose command to neglect the secret garden after her death were overturned: "The garden and garden community members have for some time been her living hands. It was because her orders to tend the garden preceded Archibald Craven's order to have it locked that Ben Weatherstaff continued to prune the garden after she died" (Bixler 1991: 221).

Weatherstaff's presence also symbolizes the significance of gardeners in large estates in the Victorian era. Gardens located around large homes like Misselthwaite served a beneficial purpose for its inhabitants. As claimed by Ikin, the head gardener was an extremely important member of the staff since the cook was reliant on them to deliver produce for the kitchen, and they worked together with the housekeeper in providing flowers for the house (Ikin 2014: 5). Even though Weatherstaff was not the head gardener, he exemplifies all the people involved in making a true garden running. Indeed, the Victorians are famous for their love of gardening. According to Price (2001: 4), by the late 1800s there were numerous publications dedicated to horticulture. Wilkinson (2013: 27) mentions some books that established this trend, including John Loudon's *The Suburban Gardener* written for the middle classes in the 1830s and *Gardening for Ladies* written by Loudon's wife (2013: 29) This demonstrated that class and sex were not a factor in the act of gardening and enjoying plants and shrubs. "The Victorians liked to encourage participation in self-improvement, and gardening fitted in with nature, geology and botany as activities taught to children" (Wilkinson 2013: 28).

Citing Adams and Mulligan, Echterling (2016: 100) claims that changes toward environmental thought happened during the height of the British Empire in the 19th century, with growing urban development and demand in manufacturing. These also lead to concerns regarding the loss of natural resources and prompted the development of national parks. The colonial mind of the British "cherished the exotic and wild environments of the periphery, but under the guise of development, it also sought to bring these environments and their inhabitants, under control to make them productive" (Echterling 2016: 100).

Wilkinson describes how meticulously Victorians created and tended to gardens, which included the different types of flowers available: "the Victorians liked their formal flower beds and their standard roses, but they also loved the wild and the exotic, the hardy perennials and the florists' flowers" (Wilkinson 2013: 2022). This would be an example of what postcolonial ecocritics refer to as "biopiracy" which means "the corporate raiding of indigenous natural-cultural property and embedded knowledge (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 13). With the numerous flowers and plants mentioned in the novel, it is difficult to say which are English and which are imported. After all, roses, which are highly associated with England, are identifiable to Mary because she saw many roses in India (Burnett 1911: 93), and lilies are native to both England and India. Either way, it allows us to ponder the mobility of the flowers within imperial nations: "The speak of postcolonial ecology is to foreground the historical process of nature's mobility, transplantation and consumption" (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 22). When we historicize the transport of these flowers, we are linking postcolonial activities with nature.

The Indian Nature

One of the crucial aspects of Mary's transformation, is that it happens in the moors of Yorkshire, England, which is vastly contrasted to her upbringing in India. Referring to the above quote when Mary is immediately introduced as a "disagreeable" looking child, the author indicates her birth in India as the main culprit. In this way, "Burnett perpetuates contemporary stereotypes when she depicts Mary as if her birth in India has somehow infected her with the same color as its natives" (Price 2001: 8). Therefore, it is her supposed Indian nature that makes Mary look and feel ill, and as she progresses with her gardening activities, she becomes less Indian and more English, in other words, healthier in the eyes of Burnett and her readers. "She will trade her sickliness for health, her yellow skin for white, her Indian nature for an English one. This metamorphosis is accompanied by- in fact, is inseparable from- The Indian-born Mary's inculcation in English ways and values. Plunging her hands into English soil becomes a cure for creolization" (Price 2001: 4). Mary's interaction with the garden, hence, while healing both her body and soul, is making her more English. In this case, the author is associating sickness and ill manners with India and good health and temperament with England.

Throughout the novel, Mary's improvement in England is contrasted with her deficient state in India. When Mary asks her uncle for "a bit of earth" to grow things, she is showing an interest in growing, but along with this interest in the new land, comes a contrast to her Indian life: "'I didn't know about them in India,' said Mary. 'I was always ill and tired, and it was so hot. I sometimes made little beds in the sand and stuck flowers in them. But here it is different'" (Burnett 1911: 144). Earlier, there is a similar passage: "In India she had always been too hot and languid and weak to care much about anything, but in this place she was beginning to care and to want to do new things" (1911: 82). The repetition of this idea creates resonance with the reader, who may have had the same opinion in imperial Britain. According to Price (2001: 8)

this negative view is permeated through both the land and the people: “In this perspective, the stock English view of the subaltern as lazy becomes attributable not only to an inherent racial characteristic, but also to the climate.” We, therefore, see the difference of land, where India is represented as a barren wasteland incapable of natural growth while England has lush gardens and bounty. Land, hence, can stand as a symbol for people, where the English embody positive attributes including growth, which becomes a lever for their dominance over the Indians who, according to them, are lacking.

Referring back to Mary’s introduction in the novel, Echford-Prossor points out (2000: 243) that in the first chapters, Mary’s world is a mix of Indian and English. She has Ayahs instead of nannies and is very distant to her mother: “not only is Mary not heard, she is also not seen.” This distance makes Mary refer to her mother as the “Memsahib” and so she sees her mother from the “native” viewpoint. Thus, she is unaware of how Indian her world really is until she realizes her ignorance of the English way of life after travelling to Yorkshire, which is a place that is strange to her (Echford-Prossor 2000: 243). Indeed, Mary is just as displaced in England, a country she is unfamiliar with. For example, she is perplexed by the servant Martha, who is very loquacious and speaks her mind. “Mary listened to her with a grave, puzzled expression. The native servants she had been used to in India were not in the least like this. They were obsequious and servile and did not presume to talk to their masters as if they were their equals” (Burnett 1911: 29). Not only does this scene illustrate Mary’s prejudice, but it becomes a turning point with Mary’s rejection of her Indian association.

In the scene that immediately follows, Martha mentions how curious she was to meet Mary, thinking that she was a native. Mary immediately yells at Martha, calling her names, but Martha kindly retaliates:

> “Who are are you callin’ names?” she said. “You needn’t be so vexed. That’s not th’way for a young lady to talk. I’ve nothing’ against th’ blacks. When you read about ‘em in tracts they’re always very religious. You always read as a black’s a man an’ a brother. I’ve never seen a black, an’ I was fair pleased to think I was goin’ to see one close” * * * “You thought I was a native! You dared! You don’t know anything about natives! They are not people- they’re servants who must salaam to you. You know nothing about India. You know nothing about anything!”
>
> (Burnett 1911: 32-33)

What this passage tells us is that some people, such as Martha (who as a servant, represents the lower classes), are ignorant about other cultures without being exactly prejudiced. Martha calls them “blacks,” not knowing any better, but she has positive statements about them; she is genuinely curious. Mary, who belongs to the upper class, shows extreme chauvinism, and being a member of this class whilst residing in India, she is inadvertently associated with imperialism.

It is difficult to suggest the particular attitudes of Burnett, but it is safe to say that as somebody who has not set foot in India, her depiction of the country suggests imperialist and racist discourses and attitudes. Britain by this point, was an imperial superpower, but India was perceived far different from other large colonies. Kao (2020)[2] discusses British Victorian Historian John Seeley, who wrote about the different colonies, making the point that colonies such as Australia, Canada, etc. had stronger ties to Britain than India, because the people were united by race and religion. This is why, he suggested to concentrate on the colonies that are bound to Britain by blood ties, versus India that was conquered: “It may be fairly questioned whether the possession of India does or ever can increase our power or our security, while there is no doubt that it vastly increases our dangers and responsibilities” (Seeley 1883: 8). Seeley

thus, proposes the view that India differs too greatly to be worth having as a colony for Britain. Interestingly, he mentions "power" and "security" suggesting that a colony that complicates Britain's empire, does not provide enough appeal.

The view however, among many British Imperialists was that India was a colony worth holding. According to Said (1993: xxi), the British and French colonizers in the nineteenth century were engrossed in the ideology of being the authority of the colonized countries:

> If you were British or French in the 186os you saw, and you felt, India and North Africa with a combination of familiarity and distance, but never with a sense of their separate sovereignty. In your narratives, histories, travel tales, and explorations your consciousness was represented as the principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic geographies and people.

The colonizers, hence, had this imperial consciousness where although the colonized lands were distant, their habits were inseparable. An example is their use of luxury goods from the lands they possessed, as mentioned earlier, regarding the flowers. Victorian gardens and horticulture were influenced by exotic plants from imperial land. Price (2001: 4) mentions that in addition to their domestic flowers, they prized exotic flowers such as the orchid, and famous gardens would display these flowers, where they "stood as vivid reminder of the reach of the English imperial hand and its power to put the foreign on display." Many wealthy homes in Britain displayed luxuries obtained from lands such as India, which is even exemplified in *The Secret Garden*. On rainy doors, when it was not possible to go outside, Mary took to exploring Misselthwaite. "In one room, which looked like a lady's sitting room- the hangings were all embroidered velvet, and in a cabinet were about a hundred little elephants made of ivory" (Burnett 1911: 68). The colonial presence, hence, was very much a part of Misselthwaite, and this was certain to be the case in other estates throughout Britain.

Cinematic Interpretations

As with any beloved books, screen adaptations are created and then recreated to cater to new audiences and capture the spirit of the times. For example, one of the first adaptations made in 1949 contains a "Hitchcockesque subplot and the questionable circumstances surrounding Lilias Craven's death" to emphasize melodrama popular during that time (Gillispie 1996:135) while the feminist movement had an impact on the 1987 version (1996 :136). There was also a 1975 BBC miniseries that of all adaptations most closely follows the book, as miniseries do not need to compress time as films do. The two adaptations selected for this study are the 1993 version, because of its widespread appeal among audiences of all ages, and the newest version from 2020, because of its unique change in time period and race alteration, thus creating a possibility for postcolonial observation.

Just as novels address or ignore concerns, film adaptation of these novels can shift and accentuate the issues, especially to fit the agenda of the makers and/or viewers. Kao (2020) explains this as she looks at postcolonial versions of various British novels: "Postcolonial film adaptations- films that, regardless of the director's country of origin, explore issues of imperialism from a critical perspective- address the question of how British fiction is appropriated to speak to contemporary global power inequalities" (12). Kao (2020) discusses the different possibilities when making a screen adaptation, where sometimes the screenplay is as close to the original novel, but sometimes are "transcultural adaptations" which involve "a change of language, place, time period, or some combination of these" (28). This is the case

with the 2020 adaptation, which is not set in Victorian times, but in 1947 amidst the turmoil of the Partition of India and the finalization of Indian independence.

When these kinds of changes happen, according to Kao (2020), "indigenization" can occur. "To indigenize is to revise the dominant discourse, appropriating it across language, place, and time to serve a new purpose- one that is chosen and given new resonance through the agency of adapters in the new context" (28). Hence, with the change of time period, the discourses surrounding imperialism are changed to discourses surrounding the post WWII era, which is demonstrated by Lord Craven's manic throwing of objects that were destroyed in the war. The change of imperial discourse is exemplified by changing Yorkshire country characters into people of color. Martha can no longer be curious about meeting a "black" if she is black herself. Indeed, by making Martha and Dickon people of color, the movie holds true to a new tradition of race swapping in film and TV adaptations, which has received both praise and criticism in recent years.

The portrayal of India also differs between the two movies. In the 1993 film, Mary remains very similar in her opinions to the book. When the movie opens, we hear Mary narrating: "My name is Mary Lennox. I was born in India. It was hot and strange and lonely in India. I didn't like it" (*Garden* 1993: 1m). In the other film, Mary does not seem to have such a negative attitude, and we only hear her saying: "I want to plant outdoors. It was too hot to do so in India" (*Garden* 2020: 30m). In fact, this version displays India as a content place for Mary, since she has many colorful flashbacks of happy memories with her father there. This is vastly different from the book and other film versions where Mary is isolated and ignored by her parents. In terms of the negative Indian views, the housekeeper, Mrs. Medlock, who is somewhat incorporated as a villain, is the character who has this attitude. When Mary asks about wild dogs, she responds with "This is not a manor, it is an estate. Of course we don't have a problem with wild dogs. You're not in the colonies now" (Garden 2020: 18m).

This creation of Mrs. Medlock as close to a villain, is something that both films share, and how they differ from the book, where she is merely a stern woman. Brilliantly portrayed by the actresses Dame Maggie Smith and Julie Walters, respectively, Medlock serves as a hindrance to the children, even locking Mary up. In the 1993 film, she is also an enormous barrier to Colin remaining outside and is convinced of the dangers that both Mary and the outdoors pose: "Oh, God, look at your legs, they're all swollen and red! Between that wretched girl and the dangers of the fresh air, heaven knows what's happened to you. You could be clotting!" (Garden 1993: 1hr20m).

The major difference between the movies is how the magic of the garden is portrayed. Both utilize magical elements, but in very different ways. Gillispie (1996: 139) mentions the magical elements of the 90s version, for example the scene where Archibald Craven has a dream about Lilias: "True to the text, her spirit summons her husband to Misselthwaite and his son, but in Holland's interpretation this occurs after the children perform a bewitching druid ritual, chanting incantations to call Lord Craven home. Holland's departures from the text heighten the distinctive magical elements in this adaptation" (Gillispie 1996: 139). In the novel, besides his dream, one factor that causes Mr. Craven[3] to return is a letter he receives from the mother of Martha and Dickon, Mrs. Sowerby, who is a character that is omitted from the films.

Another part of the magic is the representation of nature scenes. In an interview that Gordana Crnković had with the director, Agnieszka Holland (1998:4), Holland said that due to a positive test screening, the producers pushed her to enhance aspects she was not so keen on: "Like, oh, it's so good, we'll have such a great average of excellence, let's do some little changes, put some more music here and some more flowers there." She later showed the movie

at a workshop, where the students were able to tell where the scenes were overdone. “They like the movie very much but pointed out the places where it was ‘too much’” (1998: 4). Nonetheless, this version has great cinematography which has been appreciated by many people, including Arbuthnot who writes: “The two films have the same plot but wildly different vibes - Agnieszka Holland’s version was elegant, restrained, moving, while this new 2020 reboot is sloshing with CGI, hyperactive and unimaginative, so supersaturated that some scenes sear the eyes” (Arbuthnot). The newer film, indeed, does not give justice to the beautiful Yorkshire landscapes.

Another significant factor of the “Magic” played out, are the transformations of Mary and Colin, which are both downplayed in the 2020 film. Although the 1993 film does not focus on Mary’s looks, as she remains very similar in that regard, her nature changes tremendously. As in the books, planting seeds in the garden with Dickon is how she nourishes the garden, and these actions in turn nurture her. In terms of alterations, the film’s main focus is on Colin, who is played out almost identically to the book, with a few alterations for time’s sake. The newer version disappoints in this regard. Through pictures of Colin as a child, Mary finds out that he had the ability to walk all along, and her interaction with the garden is simply a way for her to enjoy her time at Misselthwaite. Yes, the cinematography creates a sense of magical realism, but from an ecocritical standpoint, there is no symbiotic relationship between Mary and the garden as she does not help the garden grow. This omission of Mary’s labor in the garden fails to execute the essence of healing and growth that is the major focal point of the novel.

My final point relates to the main climax of the story. In all versions, Archibald Craven goes to the garden and finds out that Colin is able to walk. In the last scene of the book, they come to the house: “Across the lawn came the Master of Misselthwaite, and he looked as many of them had never seen him. And by his side, with his head up in the air and his eyes full of laughter, walked as strongly and steady as any boy in Yorkshire- Master Colin!” (Burnett 1911: 364). Mary (who is practically omitted at the end of the book) plays a more significant role in the ending of the 90s film, where Archibald holds his hands out to his son and niece. “The Spell was broken. My uncle learned to laugh, and I learned to cry. The secret garden is always open now- open, and awake, and alive. If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden” (*Garden* 1993: 1hr 38m). Now, this “spell” that Mary refers to, alludes to something she mentions earlier when describing Misselthwaite: “As Mary wanders through a cobwebbed and vine-and-pigeon invaded wing of the massive home, she tells the audience, ‘The house was dead, like a spell had been cast upon it’ The cursed atmosphere of the mansion supports the more pervasive hex hovering over the inhabitants” (Gillispie 1996: 139). This coincides with what Bixler (1991:215) says about the power of the house:

> In *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and *A Little Princess* (1905) as well as in *The Secret Garden* – the romances which carry Burnett’s reputation as a classic children’s author – large houses remain images of economic, primary patriarchal power. However, these romances also suggest that if houses are not filled with nurturant power, they are essentially empty; they are not really homes.

According to Bixler (1991: 219) in the book, Misselthwaite Manor does not need to be deserted or exchanged, as it is already in the process of transformation by the same nourishing power that has taken over the garden. In fact, important actions happen simultaneously between the house and the garden, such as Mary discovering the key around the same time that she discovers Colin. In the 2020 movie, however, the climax is when Lord Craven accidentally burns down the house. Based on Bixler’s idea, this could represent the loss of his power, which is necessary

to rebuild, and therefore the closing scenes involve him rebuilding the house as the children play outside.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discovered the significance of the garden and attitude towards India as motifs of postcolonial ecocriticism in *The Secret Garden.* In the period of imperialism**,** India represents the cultural "otherness" which lays in opposition to the ideals of the English countryside. India is also seen as a barren land where plants cannot grow (even though their exotic flowers were sought after) while England is the place of lush gardens where children can grow and where "Magic" happens. While postcolonialism is focused on the past, ecocriticism is concerned with the future. With both though, there is the task of revealing and rectifying the flawed ways of life in the world (Banerjee 2016: 195). It seems that new film adaptations could work to "rectify the flawed ways", or at least attempt to. It certainly seems that the 2020 film version attempts to repair the prejudiced attitude of the book, which includes a change in the characters' attitudes and actions (and even race) in addition to changes in setting. However, this perhaps is not something to cover up, but to learn from: "To separate the history of empire from ecocritical thought dehistoricizes nature and often contributes to a discourse of green orientalism. This is unfortunate not only for its misrepresentation of the past, but also for our ecological futures, as we all have much to learn from this long and complex history" (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 28). Therefore, we can learn from this complex history by seeing what novels have to say, and the way film adaptations either enhance or conceal some main issues.

Notes:

1. The association with India is discussed in the next section, The Indian Nature.
2. Vivian Y. Kao's text *Postcolonial Screen Adaptations and the British Novel* is discussed more in the next section, Cinematic Interpretations. For more information on screen adaptations, see also Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Peter Hulme's *Postcolonial Film: History, Empire, Resistance.*
3. In the book, Archibald Craven does not have a title, but in both movie versions he is made a Lord, probably to explain his possession of such an estate as Misselthwaite.

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Caroline Ann Daněk Kyzek
Pedagogická fakulta
Trnavskej univerzity v Trnave
Priemyselná 4
P. O. BOX 9
918 43 - Trnava
e-mail: carolineann.danekkyzek@truni.sk

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