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Nature and Humanity as Healing Forces in Empowering the Disabled:

A Study of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

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Abstract

This paper entitled "Nature and Humanity as Healing Forces in Empowering the Disabled: A Study of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*" focuses on Disability Studies that explores the minds of disabled bodies that assists to regenerate the stereotypic limits, the society inject in them. Issues of disability in Children's literature focus on the emotional complexity in young personalities. This paper speaks about the healing of lives by nature in the form of a garden. The renovated secret garden in this novel rejuvenates the physical and spiritual lives of Lennox and Cobin, the disabled figures focused. The paper focuses on Mary Lennox, the sick and abandoned girl. Being a nature lover, she submits herself to the secret garden to blossom into a kind hearted girl. Her kindness and love lights up the life of Cobin, the young boy, whose freedom is restricted within the confines of his wheelchair. Healing process is not only done by nature but also by human beings who find them through nature.

Key Words: Garden, Nature, Children, Healing.

Disability refers to non-normative physical, intellectual, or psychiatric abilities. Changes in attitudes towards disability in Children's literature can be traced by turning the pages through the history of children's books. Issues of disability in children's literature, focuses on the emotional complexity in young personalities. A disability studies perception explores that disability is socially constructed and sheds light on literature that reflects the social conditions within which it is written. Definitions of disability survey the causes, effects, representations, and implications of disability. The world is a place where healthy normal individuals compete with one another to prove their own capabilities, physically and mentally. The unfocused and



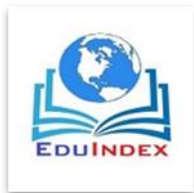
incompetent persons deserve and needed to be concentrated and disability studies pave way for a truthful understanding of the physically disabled. Disability is socially constructed in literature and it relates to how disability affects the character's interactions with family and the wider community and the way people with disabilities are treated, and the problems that these characters face in the society.

Frances Hodgson Burnett is a Britain born American playwright and novelist. She is known for her best known children's novels, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*. *The Secret Garden* narrates the story of Mary Lennox, the sickly, unloved, ten year old "mistress contrary" (16) who is rescued from a deserted house after her parent's death. Then she is sent to live with her uncle Craven in Yorkshire. She is introduced to a secret garden of Mrs. Craven by her maid Martha that has been locked for about ten years. Mary becomes curious to get into the garden and the rest of the story contains her experience in the garden with the people she started liking in Yorkshire.

This article explores the hidden garden that is magical in the way it is responsible in evolving the character and health of the children in the novel. The garden presented here is an embodiment of nature's presence that provides psychological and philosophical truths that cleanses one's soul. Nature and the process of natural happenings are magically experienced by Laureth and Colin, the disabled characters.

Mary, being a sickly abandoned child is never found getting attached to any of the people related to her. She was the only girl in her family who has survived the cholera epidemic. She is not seen worried about the loss of either her father or mother as she is emotionally callous. She is introduced as, "a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby she was kept out of the way and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling thing she was kept out of the way also"(7), and these lines helps the readers to get instant ideas about her emotional disability.

Colin is the major disabled character under focus. He is known to be the "Young Raja" (137) of the palace and everything happens in response to his orders and wishes. His wish is that no one is allowed to see him or know about him. He is an introvert and often breaks down crazily during his tantrums (outburst of temper). The reference to his illness was like "someone was



crying and screaming at the same time, screaming and crying in a horrible way. ‘ It’s Colin,’ she said. ‘He’s having one of those tantrums the nurse called hysterics (state of extreme upset) how awful its sounds’” (169). He also envisions an imaginary hunchback and an illusioned illness that makes everyone in the palace feel pity for illness. He gradually settled down in the thought of illness and does not try to walk until Mary comes into his life. The doctor who visits him daily advises him not to strain himself and to give enough rest to his body. He gets confined in his wheelchair within the four walls and the first consolation he finds is from Mary, the abandoned girl.

Mary’s oneness with nature in Yorkshire made her strong enough to bring up Colin who is one another sick and abandoned kid like her. She feels hunger in her stomach for the first time only after spending her time in the garden there. Her pale thin face gets pinker and healthier day by day as the secret garden started to bloom. Martha feels her body and hair getting healthier and better. The fresh air she breathes makes her feel alive the more every day, “the big breaths of rough fresh air blown over the heather filled her lungs with something which was good for her whole thin body and whipped some red color into her cheeks and brightened her dull eyes”(47-48).

While humanity is seen as the driving force of healing, Dickon, the animal charmer is found to be an embodiment of it. Mary, Ben Weatherstaff, Martha and her mother Suzan Sowerby are all other human healing forces next to Dickon. It is believed that the whole universe functions in response to the vibration of nature and nature is trusted to be the foremost healing source for all creatures that lack in peace.

The mystery behind the Secret garden is that the wife of Mr. Craven falls to death in her garden when the branch she is seated breaks. After mourning her death Mr. Craven orders that no one must dare to enter the garden. The disability of the garden is compared with the disability of Lennox and particularly Colin. Robin, the bird compares his little birds that learn to fly with Colin who learns to walk like any other boy in Yorkshire. The Garden and the magic in it is credited for Colin’s “sharp chin and hollow cheeks which had filled and rounded out” (257). Mary is introduced as a callous child and she is mocked by the children of the clergyman as



“Mistress Mary’ Quite Contrary” (16). When Mary first meets Colin in Misselthwaite he is introduced to her as “a boy who had been ill, but he was crying more as if he were tired and cross than as if he were in pain”(172). It is not very clear about the disease Colin is suffering with. It is known that he usually come across tantrums and the nurse calls it “hysterics” (168). One night when Colin screamed louder, Mary tried to calm him down, Colin choked out as “I felt the lump- I felt it” (171). He cries out that he has a hunch in his back and he is about to die soon. Mary furiously replies “Theirs is not a single lump there” (172) and that is the first day he feels like someone is telling the truth and calms himself. The sick boy becomes a strange boy spirit. He utters - “The sun is shining the sun is shining. That is the Magic. Being alive is in me .It is in me- it is in me.It’s in every one of usMagic! Magic! Come and help!”(233).

Mr. Craven, father of Colin is discussed in fewer places but he is also in one or other way healed by the nature and he hates seeing his son sick. He has kept his mind filled with dark and negative thoughts. Colin hates the fact that his father doesn’t like him. Colin says “I used to hate it because he was not fond of me” (255).

Providing space and time for discussions about disability literature brings the wider perspectives of society into the classroom and allows students to get awareness in which to consider Humanity. As Donna Sayers comments, through literature discussions, the disabled’s voices are heard, they are able to connect the books to their lives, and they gain multiple perspectives on complex issues such as stereotypes and prejudice.

This paper not only speaks out the sufferings underwent by the sick children and also the healing process. The book comprises of positive magical words that makes the readers feel fresh and light as air. The reference to seasons in the novel finds its place in most of the chapters. The descriptions of nature by Burnett make the reader get dissolve in nature. This book can also be a medicine for anyone who is hopeless in their life.

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