



The Feminist contrast in the films of *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*

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Abstract. Frances Burnett is a famous British author of children's literature from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century. Her works are famous for their attention to the problems of women and children, and the two most classic masterpieces are *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*. *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* are both films about black women. *A Little Princess* tells the story of the heroine Sara who is still strong and independent without her father's protection, and *Secret Garden* tells the story of the white girl Mary who is lonely because her parents are dead and no one loves her, but she rediscovers her happiness because of the "secret garden". Both films have strong feminist overtones, aiming to tell readers that even in adversity, we should have a good heart and be optimistic to regain happiness.

Keywords: The Feminist, spiritual healing, personality independence

1 Introduction

The term feminism originated in France in the 19th century. With the birth of the three waves of feminist movements, the public gradually realized the contradiction and injustice of gender division.^[1] Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, shows that gender is conditioned rather than naturally formed, and women are seen as "other". Its position is determined by the relationship between male subjects. "Passivity", "dependence", and even "submission" have been shaped as women's "should" traits, resulting in women's marginal status in history.^[7] In order to demonstrate the promotion effect of the overseas expansion of British imperial colonies on British feminism in the Victorian era, this thesis compares the two different female images in Francis Burnett's two works, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*, and expounds that under the background of the overseas expansion of imperial colonies at that time, the change of female image and the embodiment of feminism in British children's novels. This thesis found that with the process of overseas expansion of the colonies, the female consciousness and consciousness of British women have been greatly improved, which is further reflected in children's novels. The advancement of feminism in the male-dominated society is the progress of the times, and it is also the confirmation of the times by literary works. Frances Burnett is a famous British author of chil

dren's literature from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century. Her works are famous for their attention to the problems of women and children, and the two most classic masterpieces are *A Little Princess* and *the Secret Garden*. She lived in the Victorian period of Britain, which was the period of the most rapid expansion of the overseas colonial empire, and also the period of the explosion of British children's fiction. [4] Before the large-scale expansion of the empire, girls were absent or only optional supporting roles in British children's novels, and only boys existed or were the main characters, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, etc. But with the expansion of the empire, there gradually appeared a large number of female writers with girls as the main character of the work, such as Sarah Fielding's *Governess*, Charlotte Younger 's *Daisy Necklace*, Burnett's *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*. The images of women in British children's novels have undergone great changes in accordance with the background of *The Times*, which in essence reflects the gradual development of feminist consciousness and consciousness, as well as the advancement of society and culture. [2] From the perspective of feminism, this thesis is based on the two films *A Little princess* and *the Secret Garden*, comparing and analyzing the similarities and differences of feminism in the two films.

2 The feminism in *A Little Princess*

Rich Colonel Crewe and his daughter Sara have a wonderful time in India. Until the outbreak of the war, Colonel Crewe need to go to the war, so he had to send Sarah to the famous miss Minchin's girl's school in New York, entrusted her daughter to Mrs. Minchin to take care of her, and left a large payment, so that her daughter could live without worry after she left. Miss Minchin arranged the largest and best room for Sara and let her live like a princess. But the day is unexpected, on her birthday, the front line suddenly came the news that her father was killed, Sara became an orphan, Mrs. Minchin began to expose her greedy snob nature, Sara's life trajectory began to change. She makes Sara live in a rundown attic like the black girl Becky, can't eat with white girls, and has to work as a school maid to pay off debts. Sara changes from princess to poor little girl in an instant. However, she did not give up on herself, but was still strong and optimistic. Her strong feminism was reflected in the following points:

2.1 To miss Minchin

When she first came to the school, miss Minchin told Sara that she was not allowed to wear jewelry at school. Sara insisted on wearing the necklace left to her by her mother. At this time, her feminism had begun to show its signs. Later at dinner, Miss Minchin told them no talking at the table, but Sara said that doesn't seem natural. Upon learning of Sara's father's death, Miss Minchin sends Sara to live in the attic and becomes angry when she tells stories to schoolgirls, mocking her for treating herself like a princess in such a hostile environment. With her eyes firmly fixed, Sara uttered a classic sentence: I'm a princess. All girls are. Even if they live in tiny old attics.

Even if they lived in tiny old attics. Even if they dress in rags. Even if they aren't pretty or smart or young. They are still princesses. All of us.^[6] Here, her feminine consciousness and spirit of resistance are strongly highlighted.

2.2 To the black girl Becky

In the film Becky was treated unfairly because of her skin color. She could not attend classes with the students and could only clean; She lived in a very bad house, and the food she ate was very bad. To make matters worse, the teachers at the school did not allow the students to talk to her. So Betty had to live in loneliness, because she had no one to talk to. She was just a poor little girl who was denied her freedom of speech because of the color of her skin. Little children are taught that black people are not good, that they are inferior, that they do not belong, and that they should be avoided. They don't know exactly what black people have done wrong to deserve this treatment, but they just blindly and passively accept the education of teachers or parents, instead of really reaching out to them, understanding them, and drawing their own conclusions, which leads to the problem of discrimination being passed down from generation to generation. In this sense, Sara is different from other students. When Becky serves food, the other students remain silent but Sara would politely says thanks. She gave Becky a pair of shoes and hoped that they would become good friends. She also told Indian stories to accompany lonely Becky. When she and Becky were punished by Mrs. Minchin for not eating, she also comforted Becky: Don't cry Becky. I'm here with you, I've always thought of us as sisters. Here, Sara's strong feminist color is also highlighted, and the film also expresses the appeal to eliminate racial discrimination and equality for all.

2.3 To the white

When she hears little Lottie cry, Sara patiently comforts her that her mother has become an angel, and tells her magic stories. After being chased into the attic by Minchin, optimistic Sara still tells the students the magic stories and tell them that all girls are princesses. She also urged Mrs Minchin's sister Amelia Minchin to pursue her love and said: I think you should run away and get married. It'd be terribly romantic. With Sara's encouragement, Amelia runs to her lover. A very important expression of feminism is the courageous pursuit of true love, so Sara shows strong feminist characteristics here.

3 The feminism in *The Secret Garden*

At the beginning of the story, Mary, an English girl born in India, became an orphan overnight after her parents died in a cholera outbreak. Orphaned Mary is sent to England to live on her uncle's estate on the moors. When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen.^[8] Neglected by her parents since childhood, she is ex-

tremely cold and insecure. However, unlike the traditional image of a gentle and submissive lady, Mary has a unique personality.^[3] She is self-centered, brave and independent, shining like a thorny rose in a male-dominated society. She is the first to enter the secret garden and becomes the leader of her male companions, leading Dickon and Colin in their efforts to bring the garden to life. This kind of thing is the traditional women dare not think, but Mary has done it, this new female image exudes a unique charm.

3.1 To Uncle Mr. Craven

When her uncle Mr. Craven first summoned her and mentioned that he would arrange a governess or a nurse for her, although she was a little nervous in the face of her male elders, she finally bravely expressed her will that she did not want a nurse, but only wanted to play outdoors. In addition, she also bravely asked her uncle for a small piece of land, and unexpectedly got the uncle's consent, allowing her to use any land, which in fact subtly obtained the right to enter the secret garden. It was the Secret Garden that opened her spiritual journey and was healed by the forces of nature.

3.2 To Colin Craven

In the process of getting along with Colin, Mary, as a woman, is no longer a vulnerable role that needs to be protected by men, but helps Colin change his own concept. At first, when he did not know Mary, Colin had been convinced that he had a bad back and would die soon, so he lay in bed every day. He thought there were germs in the sun, locked himself in a darkened room for years, and even screamed wildly when Mary opened the curtains in her room. After knowing Mary, he began to gradually change his mentality under Mary's guidance, believing that his back was not a problem; After following Mary into the secret garden, the beauty of the garden inspires him to have the courage to live and begin to believe that he will live forever; With Mary's encouragement, he got out of his wheelchair and stood up for the first time; Then, with Mary and Deacon's help, he was able to pick up a shovel and hoe the soil. Together they worked and exercised in the garden when the weather was good, and explored the old house of a hundred rooms when the weather was bad, until in the end Colin forgot his illness and grew rapidly in the garden, becoming stronger and stronger. It was with Mary's help and encouragement that Colin changed from "a hysterical, half-mad, half-stupid little paranoid patient into a normal lad who was full of energy and could run around the garden laughing." In this process, Mary as a woman, unlike traditional women, is not obedient to men and becomes the subordinate of men, but spiritually redeemes Colin and helps him gradually transform from fragile into healthy and confident. This kind of behavior of women leading men and helping men is in conflict with the social ethics of male superiority and female inferiority at that time. It breaks the traditional concept of defining the character characteristics of men and women and positioning their roles. It embodies Mary's strong feminist characteristics.

4 The similarity of feminism between *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*

Peer relationship refers to the relationship between peers or individuals with the same level of psychological development established and developed in the process of communication. [5] In children's development, interpersonal relationship has a unique role and important adaptive value that cannot be replaced by adults. Good peer relationship is conducive to promoting children's cognitive, emotional, social development, etc., and will have an important and positive impact on people's life.

4.1 In *A Little Princess*

The heroine Sara is kind and brave, and even if her family declines and she becomes a maid, she is as strong and confident as ever. She is also a leader in the peer relationships. She often helps other little girls in her childhood boarding school. Even in the narrow attic, female students would love to come and hear her stories. Their laughter accompanies lonely Sara and helps her steal back the necklace with her parents' photos. Her sincere friendship with the black girl has accompanied Sara through the darkest hours. When punished by Mrs. Minchin for not eating for a day, they comfort each other and imagine the various delicacies on the table.

4.2 In *The Secret Garden*

The communication with Martha opened the first step in the development of Mary's peer relationship, made Mary learn how to get along well with others and how to respect others, and promoted Mary to get out of the self-enclosed world and start to enter the process of socialization. The first time Mary saw Martha, she felt that the young maid was quite different from the Indian servant, for this was a peasant girl of Mary's age, a girl who was not yet trained to serve her master, and who was interacting with Mary as a companion. Before meeting Martha, Mary was a child who did not know how to get along with others in a friendly and equal manner, and did not know how to consider others. Martha taught Mary basic life skills and let Mary know how to get along with others in a friendly and harmonious way, which was the first step of Mary's growth and gradually contributed to the formation of Mary's socialization. Mary began to like Dickon when she met Dickon, because he was an optimistic, confident and loving boy. Deacon was very knowledgeable. He told Mary a lot about farming and making friends with animals, and taught her how to use all the tools for growing. With Deacon, Mary's eyes have been opened, and her cognitive abilities have been developed and improved. Mary thinks that Dickon is an interesting and wonderful boy, and Deacon's communication is pleasant, not only learned a lot of knowledge of planting and managing the garden, but also gained Dickon's good impression and love, it is Deacon inspired Mary to open her heart, he taught Mary "in the environment of flowers and birds, there are many friendly wild animals running around you," People also seem to have no need to be stubborn. Dickon gained Mary's

trust and became the first person to share a secret garden with Mary, and the two became tell-all partners when they met for the first time. After that, Mary became a follower of Dickon, following his example and learning from him how to manage a secret garden, grow various flowers, and make friends with small animals. With Dickon, Mary learned knowledge, gained friendship and gained happiness.

5 The difference of feminism between *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*

5.1 Establishing Interracial friendship

In *The Secret Garden*, there are no particularly racist descriptions. While in *A Little Princess*, Sara and Becky have an enviable friendship. In the film, Becky and Sara give each other gifts. Sara treats Becky as a true friend, tells her wonderful stories, and comforts her when she is sad and helpless, which reflects the strong humanitarian concern of the film. Becky, who is black and ostracized by other students, is finally recognized by everyone because of Sara's help. This fully shows that with the development of society, the understanding of racial issues has made great progress, and black people are more respected. At the end of the film, Sara and Becky leave hand in hand while wearing beautiful white clothes. In Western culture, white symbolizes nobility, shows their inter-racial friendship, and symbolizes equality, mutual help and love.

5.2 Establishing transgender friendship

In *The Secret Garden*, Mary has been neglected by her parents since childhood, which makes her so insecure that she is so withdrawn and cold that she never cries. After knowing Colin and Deacon, Mary became cheerful and lively, learned to work together, learned to care for others, and even became the "leader" among the three. Mary's growth benefited from the friendship with Deacon and Colin. Mary cried for the first time when she saw Colin's father looking for him. Perhaps it was this fatherly love that touched Mary's cold heart. Finally, the picture of Mary, Colin and her uncle hugging happily on the grassland makes the story have a happy ending. Good friendship gives people warmth and makes people grow.

6 Conclusion

In *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess*, Sara and Mary like to talk about the magic, which symbolizes their unyielding spirit in the face of adversity. The strong independence of the heroine in the two films tells us that no matter what difficulties and obstacles we have experienced, we should regain the courage to face life, accompany our families and friends with love and warmth, and lead ourselves live a happy and happy life. By showing Sara and Becky's friendship, Mary's friendship with

Dickon and Colin's friendship, this paper calls for world peace, racial equality, and love for all.

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