

The Secret Garden *by* Frances Hodgson Burnett



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Reviews of the **The Secret Garden** *by* Frances Hodgson Burnett

Rainpick

People are naturally inclined to hand out the "instant classic" award to the books they like, but there are only a precious few books that can hold on to such a title for over a hundred years, (this was published in book form in 1911), and still stay fresh, engaging and appealing. This book is the source and template for so many children's lit conventions that it is hard to imagine a library without multiple copies.

You can sample the book as a Kindle freebie or in some other downloadable form, since it's out of copyright and readily available. Then, and better yet, after you read it and discover its pleasures, look for a nice edition to give to each young reader you know. There are easy to read books that are shallow, and there are harder to read books with considerable depth, but this one manages to be accessible to a fairly young reader and yet still loaded with fine writing, style, character, mystery, romance, adventure and inspiration. An excellent choice.

And while you're at it, take a look at Burnett's "Little Lord Fauntleroy". He's gotten a bad rap, (probably as a result of those Fauntleroy suits and haircuts that were the rage in the twenties), but he's actually smart, level headed, and shrewdly decent in unexpected ways. So go and get your Burnett on.

Nikojas

I am not really sure how I missed out on this book as a child so I decided to read it with my daughter. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience and zipped through it in just a few days. Frances Hodgson Burnett shares some amazing insights into human nature with the reader. My daughter exclaimed at one point, "How can Mary see that Colin is spoiled but not see that she was the same at first too?" Led to some great discussions for sure! I also thought it was amazing that Burnett at times switches between different third person limited perspectives and we even have some of the events in the garden narrated from the point of view of the robin! Such clever writing!

Some reviewers complained about the fact that many of the characters speak with a Yorkshire accent and Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote it phonetically the way the characters pronounced the words. I thought it added to the fun! I tried to speak with the broad Yorkshire accent as I read it out loud and changed my voice for the different characters. My daughter and I both loved it. The Yorkshire dialect was interesting and we have been trying to throw some of the words we learned into conversation such as "wick" meaning alive or lively. From my point of view, that beats trying to throw something modern like "on fleek" into conversation!

Quellik

I never read this as a child, and I think I'm glad. Reading it now, as an over-60, garden-loving mom with lots of life experience, I think I appreciate it a lot more, although I would have loved the mystery as a kid. Now I can appreciate the serious racism, the sad child(ren) neglect, the rather pagan awakening to nature (clothed as "Magic"), and the joyous, if obvious, ending. I believe the writing was very good for its time, and had no problem with the Yorkshire dialect. Mary and Colin and Dickon all struck me as very believable characters, and the changes wrought in Mary and Colin were overall pretty credible, although they happened a bit too quickly. I had more of a problem with Archibald's rejection of his son for ten whole years. Dwelt just a bit much on the beauty and changeableness of the moors. Well worth reading.

Ylal

The death of Shirley Temple inspired me to download the movie "The Little Princess" from Amazon Instant movies. And that inspired me to order this unabridged version (but the original edition was called "Sara Crewe or what happened at Miss Minchin's.") I had not read Princess for three quarters of a century (I am now well over 80) but I never forgot the charming book which I read many times as a child and thoroughly identified with the plucky little Sara, absorbing the atmosphere of foggy London and Sara's dismal attic, being happy with her when things were going well, shedding a tear or two when things were not. One of the scenes that haunted me most as a child was when Sara, cold and hungry, throws Emily, her beloved doll, on the floor and cries "You are nothing but a doll!" She is almost at the end of her tether, but not quite. Also, her giving a beggar child five of six rolls a kindly baker had given the half-starved Sara made a huge impression on me as a little girl. Children immerse themselves in books more thoroughly than an adult, they really live inside the plot, they can and do smell the roses. When Sara was hungry, so was I.

Princess is a whacking good story which allows the tale to rise above being a lesson in morals. Kids don't want to be preached to but given a good story and interesting characters they'll get the point subtly. But that is also true with adults.

Some reviewers have criticized the book because at the end of the story Becky went home with Sara as her maid. Author Burnett, however, is being true to 1899 London. The Cockney Becky could never be the equal of Sara Crewe the heiress. It's the way things were and to some extent the way things still are. Other reviewers have complained that Sara is too perfect. She is, however, too spunky to be insipid and she is certainly not goody-goody like Pollyanna. As a child reader I didn't regard her as too perfect nor do I now.

You will laugh at an old lady reading a children's book she hasn't read in 75 years But now I read as a literary critic and Princess is not wanting in the quality of its writing and the deft originality of the plot. Ms. Burnett can write with beautifully apt descriptions and a taut, quickly moving plot. She in no way dumbs down her prose when writing for children. She puts you into foggy London right away, and introduces Sara and her father to Miss Minchin's Seminary "where the very armchairs seemed to have hard bones in them" and Miss Minchin herself had "large cold fishy eyes and a large cold fishy smile."

If you have any little girl in your family who has not read "The Little Princess" do pop the book into her Christmas stocking. She'll love it, trust me! And so will you!

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