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STRONG GIRLS NOW AND THEN

A comparison between strong girls in classic and modern children's literature as: *The Secret Garden* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

In classic children's novels such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, *Little Women* and *The Secret Garden* there are several strong, independent and wilful girls. These girls not only cope with their own situation, they are also important for how the male characters in these books accomplish. Most of the girls remain strong and independent, wilful, and, above all, they are still there, visible and present throughout the books. There is, however, one girl who is atypical; by the end of the book her sole function is to be a foil to the boy she has coaxed into action. Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (1911) is outmanoeuvred by Colin Craven who thus becomes the protagonist of the book. Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) is not the protagonist in the book, but, without her, Harry would find it difficult to handle the problems and mysteries that come in his way. Unlike Mary Lennox, Hermione Granger is never merely a foil, she remains visible and an equal to Harry Potter throughout the book.

This essay compares Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* with Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* with the aid of historical and feminist theory, though the focus is on the written text. The essay concentrates on events and circumstances in the novels where the girls show that they are strong and independent, wilful and capable of learning from their experiences, both on their own and in relation to the boys with whom they associate or are friendly. There is almost a century between these books where girls are so vital and important in the story, but in the oldest of the books the girl disappears from the story. The questions that arise from this disappearance are: Is the way Mary Lennox slips into the background a result of the era in which *The Secret Garden* was written? Can girls who are pushed into the background also be found in modern literature, e.g. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*? The order in which Mary and Colin's names are written is an indicator to their status. During the era when *The Secret Garden* was written, the most important role of women was to remain at home and make life comfortable for their husbands; they were not regarded as equal citizens. That Mary ends up as a foil to the male protagonist was the custom at the time, most women were expected to be a foil to their husband: "[their] contribution to the world was through [their] husband" (MacLeod. 4). Hermione Granger remains important and strong throughout the book because a similar fate for her would not be politically correct in our times when equality between the sexes is such an important question.

Is it possible to find the reasons why the girls are strong, wilful and independent in their education and background? Education may comprise both formal learning and general rearing practices; this essay will focus on the latter. It begins with a clarification of terms with the aid of *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. "Strong" is defined as having control or authority over

others and someone who is firm in wit and purpose. Someone who is “independent” is not subject to the authority or control of any person and is free to act as he or she pleases. A “wilful” person is determined to have his or her own way and is disposed to assert his/her own will contrary to persuasion, instruction or command. Such a person also has the will *to do* something. Some of the events and circumstances in which Mary is portrayed as strong, independent and wilful can be explained or clarified with the aid of historical and feminist theory with respect to how women and girls were looked upon, how society expected them to be and behave. Mary’s strength, independence and wilfulness are contrasted and compared with Hermione’s; the purpose of this comparison is to see how the differences in what was expected of girls at the time, i.e. the beginning of the twentieth century, and today, are reflected in literature.

Mary Lennox’s background plays a major role in making her the strong, independent and wilful girl she is. The way she is brought up, with no education whatsoever from her parents, has determined how she behaves and what she believes she is allowed to do (Burnett, 7). If a child always has “her own way in everything” (7), is greeted with “salaams” (28) from servants who call her “protector of the poor” (28) and is allowed to hit the servants (28), she believes that the world revolves around her. It is clear that Mary Lennox’s background has made her assume that she can do whatever she wants without having to ask permission.

There are the correct and the wrong way of behaving towards others; there are even books on questions of etiquette. But, children who cannot read have to see for themselves how their parents and other people act towards each other; they need to have rules and manners explained to them in order to know what is expected of them. There is no doubt that Mary Lennox has no chance of learning manners from her mother as she hardly ever sees or talks to her (Burnett, 7, 9). Using a historical view it is clear that Mary meets her parents less often than most children during this period (Mitchell, 146). Sally Mitchell describes midday meals where children were supposed to practise conversation and manners together with their parents (144). Mary is denied this experience; at the same time, her mother is absent from the nursery (Burnett, 18). This fact is noted by and commented on in rebuking terms by Mr Crawford: “[I]f her mother had carried her pretty face and her pretty manners oftener into the nursery Mary might have learned some pretty ways too” (15). There is, however, one thing that this education or lack thereof has taught Mary and it is to be “wilful” in the sense that she is determined to have her own way; she has the will *to do* something. She learns to read in spite of her governesses simply because she wants to (Burnett, 8).

Mary Lennox's background, her childhood in India and experience of how servants treated white people, even if they were children (Burnett, 28) has taught her to be strong and independent. She is "strong" in the sense that she has control or authority over others and "independent" because in India, due to the customs there, she was not subject to the authority or control of any person. Mary hardly meets anyone but the servants and she is their superior. Mary is able to draw conclusions from the way she is spoken to and treated by Martha and she compares this with how she was treated in India. She is clearly aware that she is different from other children in England and she infers that the reason is her background in India and the way she has been brought up (Burnett, 28, 29).

Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* has a background that differs from most of the children at Hogwarts. Her former environment, i.e. the Muggle world is a disadvantage as she lacks the knowledge of how to behave in the wizard world. Hermione belongs to a family with no former wizard traditions. Both her parents are dentists in the Muggle world and she does not know what is expected of her when she comes to the wizard world (Rowling, 215). Draco Malfoy expresses his opinion of non-magical families in the following terms: "They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families" (89). This "class/ethnic hatred" regarding who belongs in the school or the wizard world at all is discussed by Kate Behr in "'Same-as-Difference': Narrative Transformations and Intersecting Cultures in Harry Potter" (125-26). Irrespective of Draco's prejudice and low regard for Muggles it is clear that Hermione comes to a different world, where the students are supposed to handle dangerous magic plants and learn defence against the Dark Art.

Hermione is clearly a very strong and wilful girl. She is both firm in will and purpose and is resistant to persuasion. The letter from Hogwarts came as a surprise, though a pleasant one for Hermione (Rowling, 117). It stands to reason that Hermione must have shown a great deal of strength and will in persuading her parents, who are dentists with no knowledge whatsoever of witches and wizards, to let her study at Hogwarts, a school of witchcraft (215). Hermione is evidently aware that she is an outsider in the magic world and that she has to be strong and compensate for her lack of background knowledge. Her comment "I've learnt all our set books off by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough" shows that she has the will *to do* this, to begin at, "the very best school of witchcraft" (117). She is clearly aware that it means hard work but her words, "of course" makes it clear that she finds the task manageable.

While both Mary Lennox and Hermione Granger are strong and wilful girls, there are significant differences. Mary has developed the personality she has because of her upbringing and background in India. She has been allowed to have her own way all her life. If, as was the case with many families who lived in different parts of the Empire, she had been sent to a boarding school at an early age there is no doubt that her manners would have been different (Mitchell, 146). A boarding school cannot allow each and every child to have its own way; there must be strict rules to ensure order. In Hermione's case little is said about how she was brought up in her Muggle family. She is nevertheless from a different background to most of the children at Hogwarts and she has to be capable in order to handle the unfamiliar situations there. The mere fact that she is at Hogwarts at all shows that she has a firm will and is determined to have her own way. What the two girls have in common, is an ability to adapt to their new environment and learn from their experiences.

Mary Lennox realises that she must adapt to and learn from her new environment (Burnett, 31, 32). This becomes clear to her when she is reprimanded for the first time in her life. Martha's comment "That's not th' way for a young lady to talk" (30) teaches Mary that there is a vast difference between how you can treat servants in India and in England. In India Mary did not have to think about how she spoke to the servants because they were regarded as "not people"(30), while in England they "must at least be addressed with respect" (Riso, 38) if you want to gain theirs in return. One similarity between the life Mary led in India and her life in England is that she has her own rooms where she is told to spend her days. Her only company is the servants; she hardly ever meets any other adults. Following point relates to a historical perspective. The practice of separating the children from the adults was still the norm during this period (Mitchell, 146). As a result, Mary can remain independent and free to act as she pleases. In *Behold the Child* Gillian Avery claims that Mary is "[master] of [her] own destiny" "without adult intervention"(156). It is evident that even though Mary is a child she has higher social status than the servants have and is thus superior to them (Riso, 38). She benefits however from her new company since she has to be careful and mind her manners towards the servants; she shows that she is capable of learning.

That Mary comes to England, with its totally different climate, both climatically and socially, enables her to use her qualities, e.g. strength, wilfulness and independence. The journey to England is not something that Mary achieves on her own account; it is due to circumstances entirely out of her control (Burnett, 261, 262). Coming to England has nevertheless the effect that Mary grows stronger, both mentally and physically. During her time in India she was always ill and "felt hot and too languid to care much about anything" (7,

47, 67) but once in England the climate begins to “blow the cobwebs out of her young brain” (47). That the climate does Mary good is noted by Alison Lurie who demonstrates that it is the winds from the moors that cure Mary and makes her strong (183).

Mary’s upbringing has taught her that she *might* do whatever she wants but it is not until she is in England that she discovers that she *can* do just this. The climate in England makes Mary thrive; it does not drain all her energy. This gives her the chance to take note of and care about events and other people than herself. There is no doubt that her new social environment, the “caring environment”, as Marjorie Allen calls it, is a major factor in her development (115). This environment helps Mary to become stronger physically and enables her to use her strong will to explore and adapt to her new environment, learn from it and even help other people. Mrs Sowerby’s words “It was a good thing that little lass came to th’ Manor. It’s been th’ makin’ o’ her an’ the’ savin’ o’ him [Colin]” (Burnett, 232) puts this beyond all dispute.

Hermione is not an average magician student, or average student of any kind, as she in advance has “learnt all [her] set books off by heart, of course” (Rowling, 117), as well as “a few extra books for background reading” (117). This is not something her two future friends, Harry and Ron, have done. They have not even given this possibility the slightest thought (117). That Hermione is a good student becomes obvious during the first days at school. She is the only student who manages to perform magic on their first attempts in class (147). She knows all the answers and wishes to demonstrate her knowledge, to show that “she [isn’t] a dunderhead” (150). Hermione is capable of learning, and putting her knowledge into practice, as long as she can gain information from a book (158). She is able to perform a spell if its movements and the way of pronouncing it are described in words (186,187). She becomes nervous when matters acquire an innate ability, a gut feeling for the correct way of doing something. This is clearly shown when the children face their first flying lesson (158). There is no doubt that she needs and wants to be in control. Hermione is the only one who knows all the answers and is able to perform magic even though she is Muggle born.

It is not advisable to “stick out”, to be different from the majority if you want to be accepted in a new environment. It is most certainly not to recommend if, as in Hermione’s case, you are of “the other sort” (Rowling, 89). Hermione learns this the hard way when she overhears Ron complaining about her manners, that “no one can stand her” (187) and ends up being attacked by a troll (191). She adapts to her new environment by lying to her teachers (193). Much of Hermione’s strength lies in her intelligence and ability to learn. She is as Kate Behr concludes, “established as an authority, not just on magic, and facts”; Hermione also

manages to put her learning into practice. This enables her to help Harry and Ron who consistently find themselves in trouble.

Hermione Granger is not only capable of adapting and learning from her new environment, she is able to use knowledge from the past. Coming as she does from a pure Muggle family she has a quality not common among wizards, not even the very best, i.e. she has a logical mind (Rowling, 307). When Hermione uses this to help Harry, she shows that she is independent enough to place herself outside the wizard world for a moment. She uses her logical mind even if at the same time it reveals her *otherness*, that she, being born and bred in a Muggle family, is different from most of the children at Hogwarts. She realises that she can use this *otherness* in the fight against one of the strongest and most dangerous wizards, Voldemort. Hermione discovers that, with the aid of her logical mind, she is able to solve the puzzle that Dumbledore, one of the best wizards in the world (135), has placed as protection for the Philosopher's Stone. She is relieved and happy that she is able to solve problems that are if not impossible, at least very difficult for a child from a wizard family. The following passage shows Hermione's relief and confidence that she will succeed with the task because of who she is; a Muggle-born witch with a logical mind:

Hermione *let out a great sigh* (own emphasis) and Harry, amazed, saw that *she was smiling* (own emphasize), the very last thing he felt like doing.

[‘Brilliant,'] said Hermione. ‘This isn’t magic - *it’s logic— a puzzle* (own emphasis). A lot of the greatest *wizards haven’t got an ounce of logic* (own emphasis), they’d be stuck in here forever’.

‘But so will we, won’t we?’

‘*Of course not,*’ (own emphasis)‘ said Hermione. ‘*Everything we need is here on this paper*’ (own emphasis) (307)

The emphasised words show that Hermione is relieved and happy that the problem they have encountered concerns logic, which a lot of wizards do not have and therefore are not able to solve problems and puzzles that require other skills than magic. She is convinced that she because she is Muggle-born and has a logical mind will solve the problem.

Hermione uses her logical mind on an earlier occasion too. In the wizard world there is apparently nothing unusual in finding a room that “[is] full of jewel-bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around” (Rowling, 300), since almost everything is possible in the wizard world. Ron, who is a “pure” wizard, does not think that it is the least odd. Hermione however, using her Muggle mind, is able to draw the logical conclusion that the birds are there for a

reason. If there is a mystery to solve, where obstacles have been laid out, every element or component is there for a reason. Hermione's logical Muggle mind tells her that "they [the birds] can't be here just for decoration" (Rowling, 301). This is totally in line with Steven Lynn's conclusion that "[e]very element is essential" (14), every detail or component is important in order to see the whole. It is as Hermione states "a puzzle" (307) and it is her remark that makes the children watch the flying objects carefully and eventually discover their purpose. This indicates that Hermione is strong and independent enough to use her background to help both herself and her friends out of a dangerous situation.

The difference between Mary Lennox and Hermione Granger is that Mary remains to some extent in the same environment. She is used to living by herself with servants as only company and waited on by these. This means that in some ways she can feel safe, while she remains in a home environment. In a historical and feminist perspective this was also the custom of the time; women and girls should not as Peter Hunt writes, "stray very far from the bounds of home" (151). Mary comes to a country where the weather suits her much better and makes her blossom. Hermione does not have the same health problems as Mary does; she is consistently presented as a healthy strong girl. What she does not have is the security of familiarity with the environment as Mary does, since the wizard world is completely different to what she is used to.

The similarity between the two girls is that Hermione is in a way in a home environment since she is at school. The schools' main purpose is to take care of and educate children, so in that sense Hermione can feel safe just as Mary does. Hermione blossoms in a social sense, since she with the aid of her old environment and new-learned magical knowledge can help her new friends. The two girls are alike in that they are both able to adapt to and learn from their new environment, and, use this knowledge in a fruitful way. Mary and Hermione not only acquire knowledge in their new environment, they also improve their social skills.

The reader's first impression of Mary Lennox and her social behaviour is not a favourable one. Even though her behaviour is not excusable, it is understandable, given that she was never taught any manners by her mother, who "scarcely ever looked at her" (Burnett, 16) and that Mary always was kept "out of sight" (7). No one has ever cared for or "taken any notice of her" (17). Mary Riso describes this as "lack of adult concern for her [Mary's] mental well-being" (36). It is Martha and old Ben who first awaken Mary's interest in socialising with other people by the way they talk, in a friendly, comforting and good-tempered way (Burnett, 31, 32). Mary is also aware that the way in which Martha talks to her and treats her does her good, mainly because it cheers her up; she likes to hear Martha talk (69). She seeks

Ben's company to tell him what she has found and done on her first day in the gardens (38). She is rewarded by the pleasant discovery that a smile makes people look nicer (39). They treat you better if you smile at them and speak to them in an honest, pleasant way and most of all with respect, they treat you the same (39, 42).

Martha's lesson, that you have to like yourself before anyone else, does make Mary think (Burnett, 61). However, Mary evidently has some notion of the importance of how to make a request before this lesson. Her words "I should like to see your cottage" is not the way she used to make requests and this is also noted by Martha (60). That Mary is beginning to think of people other than herself, to see the value of good manners and being nice is evident when Martha's mother presents her with a skipping-rope. Her social skills have clearly improved since earlier she would not have noticed what it takes for "a cottage full of fourteen hungry people [to] give any one a present", and she would not have thanked or given credit to anyone (69,71).

Mary's newly developed social interest makes her seek company; this is not something she has done before. An explanation is that in India she was never alone, she was always in the company of her Ayah whose sole task was to wait on her (Burnett, 53). At Misselthwaite Manor she is left very much on her own and she draws the conclusion that "this was the English way of treating children" (53). This is a correct assumption since this was, according to Sally Mitchell, the custom, although it should be noted that children were not entirely alone as they were left in the care of a nanny (146). The result is nevertheless that Mary changes: she wants company and "[makes] Martha stay with her" (Burnett, 48). Mary's background is an advantage since Martha evidently finds her interesting. Mary realises that she can use her old life to please Martha by telling her stories from India, stories which Martha can retell at home (68). Mary not only wants and seeks Martha's company; she wants old Ben to be interested in her as well. It is her different attitude towards him that makes him notice her and appreciate her company (87). At their first meeting she gives the impression of not being "at all pleased to see him" and "was displeased with his garden", which has the result that he treats her thereafter (36). Mary's words, "[p]eople never like me and I never like people" (38) show that she is aware of the effect behaviour has.

Hermione Granger is presented as a bossy girl who points out that she is highly competent and does not give a thought to how her peers perceive her. Her comments "Are you sure that's a real spell?" and "Well, it's not very good, is it? I've tried a few simple spells just for practice and it's all worked for me" reveals her lack of modesty (Rowling, 117). The way Hermione always tells others, especially Harry and Ron, what to do and how to do it, is her

attempt to gain control, to know that people and things are in their proper places and behave the way they ought to (116,118,121,170). The girl believes that having a good solid grounding in academic learning will help her through most difficulties. One example of such a conviction is the sorting ceremony, which she believes to be a test (127). Hermione apparently needs the security of doing things “by the book”. In an interview by Margaret Weir, J.K Rowling acknowledges this need to her interviewer. Rowling claims that Hermione “is based almost entirely on [herself]”, she was just as Hermione “obsessed with achieving academically, but this masked a huge insecurity” (Weir).

Hermione learns that merely being good at school does not necessarily guarantee social acceptance, you have to act according to the social code as well. Hermione acts against her nature, but according to what is expected of her when she lies to the teachers for the first time in her life (Rowling, 193-94). Hermione knows this has to be done, which is demonstrated by Jann Lacoss’ words “children understand that group membership is often desirable, at least to have a sense of belonging, and that certain things must be done in order to join a group” (Whited, 72). In order to put Harry and Ron in a more favourable light Hermione uses her well-known academic skill (Rowling, 193). Her words “you know, because I’ve read all about them” followed by Professor McGonagall’s comment “Well – in that case...” makes it clear that the teacher finds her explanation to the situation as perfectly valid (193-94). Hermione both receives her first minus points and is rewarded with the boys’ gratitude and appreciation. She also shows that she is strong and independent enough to use her academic skills even though she is aware that it is these very qualities which made her “stick out” before. The fact that Hermione does not deny her academic skills in the troll situation (193) but uses them to help Harry and Ron is her way into their friendship and it also shows that the two boys accept her for who she is.

Hermione’s new friendship with Harry and Ron is appreciated by both of them thanks primarily to the fact that she is a clever girl with academic skills (Rowling, 197). Their friendship has advantages for all parties, but in Hermione’s case the most important advantage is that she is “a bit more relaxed about breaking rules” and “ she [becomes] much nicer” (197). A child who always does what the teachers tell her, always completes her homework and knows the answer to the teacher’s every question is not usually among the most popular students when it comes to one’s peers. Ron’s words “[i]t’s no wonder no one can stand her” states that this is as valid in schools for witchcraft as in real life schools (187). The troll situation teaches Hermione that sometimes you cannot cope alone, that sharing things, like fighting mountain trolls and lying to teachers bring people together (195). Eliza T, Dresang is

of the same opinion when she concludes, “this adventure served as a catalyst for their bonding” (Whited, 230). Hermione even uses magic, like summoning up warming fires to make life easier for her friends, even though she believes this to be forbidden (Rowling, 197). This new behaviour is a clear indication of Hermione’s improving social skills.

Both Mary Lennox and Hermione Granger mature with respect to social skills, they learn to appreciate company, seek it and adapt their behaviour according to the norm. They use their abilities to learn from and adapt to their new surroundings in order to be more appreciated by those around them. The girls use what they are good at, their own qualities such as Hermione’s academic skills and Mary’s story telling, as a means of being accepted. The difference between the two girls is that Hermione is able to use her book learning, which comes quite naturally to her, to become more attractive in social life. Using book learning is not possible for Mary. She has never received proper education, partly because of her manners towards her governesses, partly because she was never sent to school in England. What Mary does is use childhood experience to make herself more interesting. Her storytelling about elephants, camels and tiger hunts for Martha to bring home to the cottage is one example. Both Mary and Hermione are strong, wilful and independent in that they are not afraid to use their old ways and abilities to improve their social life and skills.

Mary Lennox is used to getting what she wants and the thought that she might be denied her desires or even that she ought to ask permission does not cross her mind (Burnett, 54, 66). When Mary discovers the closed garden, which gives her so much pleasure, she nevertheless becomes afraid that it will be taken away if Mr Craven, who is her superior, finds out that she has found and gained access to it (80). Mary chooses her words with care when she asks for matters concerning the garden. Her words; “This is such a big lonely place”, “I never did many things in India” and “I thought if I had a little spade” (80) proves to be what the highly regarded Mrs Sowerby recommends to make Mary happy (81). This indicates that she has learnt the value of being well behaved and civil to people and to speak ‘their language’ (105). The girl is without doubt strong and wilful enough to use her newly found social skills in order to have her way. Mary is able to begin her work in restoring the garden to life because of this ability. Circumstances have favoured Mary before, e.g. being sent to England, and now she is fortunate to use the exact right words when she asks permission of Mr Craven to “have a bit of earth” (113). Mary Riso claims that the garden “has been reborn to health” (21). The words “has been reborn” suggests that this is something passive, something that happens on its own. However, the garden would not have had a new life if it were not for Mary. It is Mary because she is firm in will, who has the will *to do* something with the garden and because she

is not subject to the authority of anyone, who manages to get access into the garden. It is Mary who brings the garden back to life after a long period of neglect.

Colin Craven is, like the garden, neglected and would have remained neglected and hidden if Mary had been taught to ask permission (Burnett, 117). Mary awakens Colin's interest in matters beyond himself by mistake when she mentions the garden (122). But, she once again proves that she knows how to speak to people, and not least important, how to make them act as she wants. Mary convinces Colin to keep the knowledge of the garden a secret in spite of his threat to use his authority over the servants (124-26). Because of her upbringing in India, Mary is aware of the power Colin has over the servants and what he can do with this power. He even has power over her, as he is Mr Craven's son and thus her superior (135). Her knowledge of authority and power makes her achievement noteworthy and shows that she is strong, wilful and independent as she manages to stand up to authority. Mary is aware of Colin's power, but, she is also aware that there are certain things you cannot make other people do, things that have to do with your inner self, which following words show: "Shall they, Mr. Rajah! They may drag me in but they can't make me talk when they get me here. I'll sit and clench my teeth and never tell you one thing. I won't even look at you" (158). Mary's words and reaction is clarified with the aid of a feminist perspective and the following observation by Marjorie Allen "[l]ittle girls, before they reach puberty can be courageous, competent, and irreverent; they can be nurturing, compassionate, and introspective. They're not yet constrained by gender-role expectations" (5). In this quotation it is claimed that a girl is only able to have these qualities before she grows up and has not yet been moulded into proper shape, proper according to the era.

Mary once discovered the pleasure in talking to and being spoken to by people and acknowledges that this was good for her since it made her feel better, cheered her up and resulted in a better treatment. This is also the case with Colin, he is aware of, and acknowledges, that Mary has a healing effect on him (Burnett, 140). Mary's good influence on Colin is also noted by Mrs Medlock who says it is "a sort of blessing to the lot of [them]" (142). Because of Mary's history as a spoiled, self-centred child, she is not inclined to be lenient with Colin's tantrums and threats about dying (159). Furthermore, Mary has no intention of letting him decide whom she sees or when she sees them (157-58). Colin finds himself being told off for the first time in his life. Mary uses his fears, or as Linda T. Parsons states "[she] screams back at him [Colin], confronting and contradicting his fears: something no one had ventured to do before" (257), to give the boy a lesson. It works, because it apparently makes him think, and in a way appreciate the scolding (Burnett, 159). This shows

that Mary is able to help other people to become “better” persons with the aid of who she has been and who she is now.

Harry Potter would not have found the Philosopher’s Stone without Hermione’s ability to notice important elements and details such as “jewel-bright birds” (Rowling, 300) and draw logical conclusions thereof (176). She alone understands that the three-headed-dog is there for a reason, i.e. guarding something. It is also Hermione, who with her habit of reading a lot, finds out what the dog is guarding (237-36). Eliza T. Dresang notes that “her [Hermione’s] knowledge becomes a valuable asset” (Whited, 221). Hermione herself also declares that Harry would never get access to the stone without her, her and her books. She is very self-confident and not so nervous to get caught and expelled anymore. Hermione is correct in being self-confident because as she states, “Flitwick told me in secret that I got a hundred and twelve per cent on his exam, They’re not throwing me out after that” (Rowling, 292).

Harry knows how competent Hermione is and also acknowledges that he needs her in the attempts to get to the Stone. “Harry [turns] to Hermione” pleading for help; “Do something, he [says] desperately”, which indicates that he, like Hermione, is convinced that he cannot cope without her (Rowling, 294). Harry declares in front of Hermione herself that “[he is] not as good as [her]” (308) when it comes to magic. Hermione is not the protagonist in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* to begin with and she does not become so during the book, but she remains visible and important up until the very last page. Hermione is never encouraged by adults to give up her own life, to exist only for the boy she helps. The girl is publicly rewarded for her ability to use her Muggle skills which the average wizard or witch child does not possess, i.e. “cool logic” (328)

The garden is initially the only pleasure for the little girl whom “nothing belongs to”. Mary believes that she is the only one who cares whether the garden lives or dies and is afraid that it will be taken away (Burnett, 97). It is much thanks to the garden that Mary blossoms and becomes both likeable and liked. Even though Mary is self-centred and spoilt when she arrives in England, she is not spoilt when it comes to affection and feelings. The caring environment she meets makes her feel appreciated by other people, and that she and her well-being matter. This changes as soon as Colin Craven, the young master, enters the stage. From the moment Colin sets foot in the garden he is convinced that he “shall get well” (199) and he also claims the garden with words as “This is my garden” “I’m your master” (210) “It is my garden now” (213). What Mary fears has come true with Colin’s words, it is no longer *her garden*. This is also the moment when the focus of the story shifts from Mary to Colin. After this, it “[is] that Colin [is] getting well” and that “no one must let him [Colin] remember about

having humps and dying” (213) that becomes important. It is as if from the moment Colin enters the garden Mary has only his needs in view, as if getting Colin well is the “the chief thing” (213) of her coming to England and all her work with the garden.

The task of seeing to Colin’s needs is given to Mary by the adults around her. If he is happy their lives become calmer and much easier to live. Up until now their lives have revolved around Colin and keeping him manageable. Mary’s way of doing what she wants is used by the grown ups to make life more comfortable to both themselves and to Colin, the young master of Misselthwaite Manor. When with the aid of her strong, wilful and independent manners and mind Mary finds her way into Colin’s rooms, she at the same time finds her way into the background, the usual place for women and girls during this time. Mary is in a way herself responsible for being burdened with the task of keeping Colin manageable. She has gained his confidence and is thus the only one in the household who knows why he gets his tantrums (Burnett, 162) and most important, she knows how to calm and reassure him. Mrs Medlock’s words “He’s not had a tantrum or a whining fit since you made friends. The nurse was just going to give up the case because she was so sick of him, but she says she doesn’t mind staying now you’ve gone on duty with her” (Burnett, 142) make it clear that the adults want Mary to devote herself to Colin’s needs.

The shift of the story from Mary to Colin is entirely in accordance with the custom of the era when *The Secret Garden* was written. Women and girls were supposed to consider the needs of their husbands, brothers’ or other male relatives’ first and to make life comfortable for them. Women and girls’ contribution to society were through the men (MacLeod, 4), it was expected of them to “merge [their] identity” with their husbands’ (Allen, 5) and this is what happens to Mary. After Colin’s entrance the sole purpose of Mary’s existence becomes to ensure that Colin gets stronger and able to meet his father, the master of Misselthwaite Manor and Mary’s superior, as a healthy boy. This point relates to historic and feminist criticism. But, although Mary does what the adults expect of her, she is nevertheless aware that her situation is not what it ought to be. She considers it “dreadful” “that all the grown-up people were so frightened that they came to a little girl” (Burnett, 164-65) for help in handling a sick boy.

The two books discussed in this essay are far apart, both with respect to age and how the female characters’ roles develop in relation to the male characters’. Both Mary and Hermione are able to draw on their backgrounds in order to grow stronger and gain advantages from the new environment around them. However, they do not only use their background for their own benefit; they use it to heighten the performance of the male characters. Mary and Hermione

successfully coax the boys into action. Mary by enabling Colin to go out in the garden and thus become healthier and Hermione by encouraging and helping Harry with school subjects which improves his chances in the fight against Voldemort. But, it is only one of the two girls who benefits altogether from the relationship with the male character. In the oldest book, *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox's role as protagonist is taken over by Colin Craven, the young master of Misselthwaite Manor. This is in line with the view of women during this period, i.e. the beginning of the twentieth century, when women were not regarded as equal citizens since they had not yet, for example, gained the right to vote. This right was not gained in full until 1928. One important difference in a feminist perspective is that Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is never regarded or treated as anything but an equal to Harry, neither by her peers or by any of her superiors, i.e. the teachers and parents. Colin is by the adults around them regarded as Mary's superior, with the power that follows. Mary herself is aware of this because her background in India and she knows she has to do what the young master wants, even though she does not necessarily approve of his commands. Mary is also strong and independent enough to know that her inner self, her soul remains her own.

Hermione becomes more likeable and liked after the experiences she shares with Harry in contrast to Mary who has changed in these respects before she meets Colin. This factor makes it clear that in *The Secret Garden* it is Colin who benefits from the friendship since his behaviour improves after he has met Mary. Hermione is there by Harry's side, and duly appreciated by both her peers and superiors, all the way to the very last page, which is not the case with Mary. In the last chapters she is regarded only as the tool to make Colin well, as a foil to him; she is not visible at his side.

That Colin comes out of his room at all is Mary's doing, it is Mary, because she is strong, wilful and independent, who brings about his recovery. But, by making Colin strong, and aware that life can be worth living and enabling him to go out in the garden, Mary brings about her own fate. She does what the adults expect of her, she makes life easier and more comfortable to Colin as women and girls were supposed to do. As Colin grows stronger, Mary is slowly, and in accordance to the custom of the time, pushed into the background, and in the last two chapters the focus is entirely on Colin. Mary is only speaking in person once in these chapters and then her speech is about Colin and his wellbeing, which also focuses the reader's attention towards the male character. The last chapter ends with the words "Master Colin" and thus makes the story end as Colin's. Mary has become less and less important; she only comes on second place after Colin just as the second word in *The Secret Garden* is Mary Lennox. The order in which Mary and Colin's names appear in the novel are significant for their

status, both as protagonists and socially. Master Colin's name is the last word the reader sees, when closing the book, while Mary's; the young orphaned ward, who is initially the protagonist, is not even the first word she or he reads, only the second.

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