

Child Invalids and Invalid-ation in Victorian Literature

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Manitoba

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

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Department of English

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Child Invalids and Invalid-ation in Victorian Literature

BY

Robin Wilson

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

OF

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

“Child Invalids and Invalid-ation in Victorian Literature” addresses the lack of scholarly attention on the lives and overall ‘human experience’ of middle-class ill children in the nineteenth-century, in consideration of theories of disability and gender.

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett traces Colin’s re-validation as he transforms from Diane Price-Herndl’s effeminate in-valid into James Adams’s masculine gentleman.

Burnett’s novel also follows Mary’s gradual in-validation as she becomes Price-Herndl’s in-valid woman, while Klara in Johanna Spyri’s *Heidi* develops into Jane Wood’s ‘angel of the house’ by conforming to conventional gender roles.

In Dinah Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Phineas epitomizes Wood’s socially anomalous, in-valid male, for he is perpetually marginalized by his lifelong illness and feeble character.

This examination of nineteenth-century child in-validism ultimately acknowledges the contrast between the social roles expected of these four children as members of the middle-class and their daily experiences as marginalized in-valids.

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For my family

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Introduction

“An invalid, one who has been invalidated”
- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

Sick children in Victorian literature have largely been ignored by scholars of disease and infirmity; most work has centred on the maladies which ail the children, but not directly on the children themselves. Even studies on the most famous Victorian invalid, Tiny Tim in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, have mainly focused on the sympathy and pity he receives, rather than on the boy himself or on his daily experiences as an invalid. In this thesis, I look specifically at four sick children in Victorian literature, invalids who are often overlooked in the study of illness and disability, but who, nevertheless, provide a more detailed and focused representation of the experiences of child invalids in the nineteenth century, as imagined by their authors. Characters in *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Heidi*, by Johanna Spyri, and *John Halifax, Gentleman*, by Dinah Mulock Craik, all demonstrate the physical and, more importantly, the social limitations of childhood illness in the Victorian era. My argument is that class and gender are vital factors in the social development and maturation of in-valids, just as they are for healthy children, if not more so. But in order for such an argument to be made, we must first examine scholarly criticism of the images and perceptions of disease and disability in the Victorian era. In these novels, traditional class distinctions are simultaneously upheld and undone by the feminine and effeminate child invalids, and this conflict shows the effects of illness and how illness shapes childhood experience. Both Colin Craven and Klara Sesemann experience a “miracle cure,” which allows them to overcome the limitations imposed on them by their “illnesses,” and enables them to fulfil the social

roles expected of upper-middle-class men and women; Mary Lennox and Phineas Fletcher, on the other hand, are never “cured” from their diseases, and are thus unable to assume their proper social roles, so they remain in-valid in society.

Images of Disability

Most critics agree that disabled children in literature have traditionally been portrayed in one of two extremes, with little to no middle area or compromise between the two. The first of these extremes is what Helen Aveling calls the “accepted way of creating characters,” using stereotypes and physiognomy to reflect personality; for example, “giving evil characters a disability or twisted mind” (par. 1) enhances and highlights their cruel and wicked natures. Accordingly, “the flip sides of the accepted model [of disabled literary figures] are saint-like characters that are too good to be permitted to live to the final paragraph of the book” (par. 1). Ann Dowker points out that “the received wisdom on the part of most recent commentators on earlier children’s books is that disabled characters in books published before the time of the First World War are usually two-dimensional stereotypes” (par. 2). Cumberbatch and Negrine concur, but argue that such extremes are still employed today in the presentation of invalid figures: “The portrayal of characters with disabilities in feature films tends to be through stereotypes, and [...] the most commonly used stereotypes are the disabled person as a criminal or only barely human or someone who is powerless and pathetic” (137). In both of these extremes, “the characters are defined by [...] their physical status, not by their emotional responses” (Aveling, par. 1), so there is very little character development for invalid figures in literature, a fact which, in itself, further

marginalizes these already invalid-ated children. As Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg argue, “The conceptualisation of disability that seems to be entailed in the way disabled people are presented in nineteenth-century children’s [...] literature is of a fixed, unalterable state, defining the individual and dominating all other aspects of his/her place in society” (42). Moreover, the use of such stereotypes makes it very difficult for readers and critics alike to differentiate between a character’s disease or disability and the actual person himself; as Jenny Kendrick notes, “[there is a failure] to acknowledge characters for *who* they are, and to allow the presentation of people with disabilities as part of the range of human experience rather than as carriers of a specific disability-related significance” (par. 26). This thesis is such an acknowledgment of the overall ‘human experience’ of Colin Craven, Mary Lennox, Klara Sesemann, and Phineas Fletcher; I will examine their liminality as being neither monstrous nor angelic, and will discuss the constant marginalization they experience as in-valids.

In-Valid Men

Though the title of her study is *Invalid Women*, Diane Price-Herndl also examines the experiences of ill men in Victorian society; as she points out, male invalids were even more marginalized than their female contemporaries, for the very nature of illness is feminizing and thus undermines their masculinity: “any illness, or failure, was also a sign of ‘unmanliness’ (that is, femininity)” (180). The dependency, nervousness and weakness associated with sickness were all distinctly feminine qualities; there were no “manly” symptoms or illnesses, so all sickness served to undermine the very masculinity of male sufferers. Price-Herndl argues that “the men

live conventionally 'feminine' lives [...]. The invalid is trapped in a routine and unstimulating home, unable to escape, with all options closed off by family ties. And the invalid is described as, if not feminine, certainly not masculine; he is unmanned and therefore ill" (182). Sickness, then, was even more socially damaging to middle- and upper-class male invalids than it was for female sufferers of the same rank, for it completely erased their social standing and, more importantly, negated their masculinity. Moreover, Price-Herndl makes a direct connection between sickness and the home, arguing that "Illness is figured in the domestic arena" (183), the decidedly feminine sphere. She notes, "Men were increasingly expected to leave the household to earn their living and to depend on women to run the household amid the changing technologies of housework" (23). Confined to bed in the feminine arena, male sufferers were, therefore, unable to participate in the 'manly' work world, thereby further undermining the masculinity of male invalids. Thus, Price-Herndl asserts, "invalid men serve to suggest that if men were denied the opportunities that women have been denied, they, too, would become invalids" (181).

In *Passion And Pathology In Victorian Fiction*, Jane Wood expands on Diane Price-Herndl's theory of the feminizing effects of sickness, arguing that it was impossible for male invalids to reaffirm their masculinity while they were ill. "Representations of male nervousness," she asserts, "fashioned an image of an invalid feminized by the very nature of his disease" (60), since all of the symptoms associated with illness (weakness, hysteria, dependency) were distinctly feminine qualities and, therefore, conflicted with Victorian stereotypes of masculinity. As a result, "the taint of effeminacy which [was] attached to all forms of male nervous disorder was

extraordinarily difficult to eradicate. Invariably, medical articles on the subject of nervously ill men used language identical to that of the female stereotype of weak-willed passivity to describe their symptoms” (67). Since even Victorian physicians were describing illness as undeniably feminine, Wood posits, the only way a male invalid could break from this stereotype was to be fully cured, something that was often impossible for the infirm, given the nature of their diseases. An ill male, then, “was effectively feminized by a disorder which marginalized him socially, sexually, and psychologically from the prevailing norms of manliness” (5). Wood correctly argues that the male invalid thus became “a social, sexual, and psychological anomaly in a culture of robust and resolute manliness” (60). Therefore, even the most manly of Victorian men could not avoid being emasculated by disease. My first and third chapters discuss this male in-validation by examining the situation of Colin Craven in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* and that of Phineas Fletcher in Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Both are male invalids who are feminized by their respective diseases and are, as a result, isolated from society. Colin is able to overcome his illness and effectively reasserts his masculinity and the legitimacy of his social status, but Phineas, with a weak personality that matches his feeble health, is doomed to remain socially invalid for the rest of his life.

A further scholarly discussion of the Victorian concept of masculinity is presented in James Eli Adams’s *Dandies And Desert Saints*. During childhood, Adams argues, there was no real distinction between the sexes, since both were reared at home, the feminine domain, under the influence of females; Adams asserts that boys’ boarding schools is where masculinity was taught, since boys at home were separated from their

working fathers:

The separation of home and workplace, and the increasingly rigorous gendering of that division, led to a growing isolation of middle-class fathers from their sons, who in their early years were immersed in a sphere increasingly designated 'feminine,' and then - in a phenomenon unparalleled elsewhere in Europe - transported to the all-male environment of boarding schools. (5)

Attending boarding school, Adams argues, was a crucial step in becoming a man in Victorian society, a step which both Colin Craven and Phineas Fletcher were denied, for bedridden males were physically unable to attend that revered institute of masculinity, and were, instead, required to remain at home, the distinctly feminine arena¹. And, as "mid- and late-Victorian discourses of masculinity [were] constructed within an increasingly homophobic culture" (151), Adams asserts, effeminate males, including those feminized by illness, were considered freakish in the conservative British society. He affirms that 'manliness' was wholly dependent on physical appearance, strength, and athletic ability: nineteenth-century society "praise[d] [...] the male body as an object of aesthetic delight" (153), completely neglecting those men who were pale, feeble and confined to bed as a result of illness. Adams argues, "the [...] invocation of the male body throughout mid-Victorian discourse as a central locus of masculine authority" (151) was common; invalids and cripples, then, lacked authority and were socially marginalized, since their bodies were 'deformed' by sickness. Nineteenth-century authors, Adams notes, were perpetuating the idealized concept of the masculine athlete, influencing their readers and impressing upon them their idolization of the healthy male figure: "[writers] placed the male body into widespread circulation as an

object of celebration and desire - a project recognized in the contemporary tag, 'Apostle of the Flesh'" (150). Moreover, according to Adams, "conservative [Victorian] commentators increasingly represent the gentleman as an organic ideal, rooted above all in an innate, physiological sensibility. The gentleman's status thus derives from, and is made visible in, his body" (152). This last statement applies both figuratively and literally to the male invalid, whose illness prevented him from being considered a true gentleman, despite his wealth or family name.

In-Valid Women

Diane Price-Herndl's examination of the marginality of women in the nineteenth century is also relevant to my thesis. Though the focus of her study is on women in American society and literature, her arguments also can effectively be applied to their European counterparts, such as Mary Lennox in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Klara Sesemann in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. Price-Herndl correctly argues that marginalization is not a new experience for women; after all, they were traditionally considered to be the "weaker" sex, simply because they were not males: "women in general are characterized as weak and lacking power, better off staying at home" (2). This characterization, she asserts, led to the in-validation of all women, regardless of their physical or mental well-being:

in the nineteenth century it [invalidism] meant a state of weakness or a predisposition to illness. Invalidism therefore referred to a lack of power as well as a tendency toward illness [...]. 'Invalid' further carries traces of its etymology and suggests the not-valid. Invalidism is therefore the term that best

describes the cultural definition of women in the nineteenth century (and perhaps the twentieth) and the ill woman's relation to power and her culture.

But it also describes the historical status accorded to ill women's (and maybe all women's) desires: not valid. (1)

Price-Herndl further asserts that such gender roles for females were encouraged and enforced by male-dominated society, and she notes that, "women have been discouraged from involving themselves in active work" (2) because employment was not considered appropriate for the "weaker" sex. Women were thus persuaded to remain at home, where they were to supervise the servants, rear the children, and become the 'Angel of the House' which was so idealized in the nineteenth century.

Ill women, according to Price-Herndl, were in an even more dire social situation, because they were physically or mentally incapable of performing even the limited roles which society expected them to play: "the invalid is specifically recognized as even weaker and more powerless than most women and is required to stay at home" (2), confined to bed or, if she is lucky, a wheelchair. Female sufferers, therefore, were pushed even further than healthy women into the margins of society, for not only were they dependent on their fathers and husbands for financial support, but they also had to rely on servants and family members for all aspects of their daily lives. Rather than playing the matriarchal 'Angel of the House,' then, an ill woman was helpless and feeble, incapable of performing the tasks society set for her, which only added to her already-marginalized social position. And whereas healthy women were strongly discouraged from entering the male-dominated workforce, "the invalid has been absolutely forbidden it" (2). Moreover, because male-dominated society already

considered even the healthiest and most robust woman to be weak and feeble, illness came to be considered a natural and appropriate condition for all females. According to Price-Herndl, “the invalid, defined by her body and her weakness, represents an exaggeration of one of the ‘natural’ conditions of all women” (8). Thus,

‘illness’ is a defining term, especially when it involves the categorization of someone as ‘invalid’; it is a figure for explaining one’s place in society.

Representing one’s self as an invalid puts into play a whole structure of care, attention, responsibility, and privilege. Defining what counts as illness, setting boundaries around who can and cannot be considered an invalid, however

‘natural’ these definitions may seem, are [...] influenced by representation. (9)

This discussion is particularly relevant to the examination in my second chapter of two female invalids in Victorian literature, Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, and Klara Sesemann in *Heidi*, both of whom react differently to this stereotype. Whereas Mary passively accepts this socially-marginal position and never tries to exert any authority of her own in her new home, Klara successfully adapts the role of ‘Angel of the House’ to accommodate her invalidism and wheelchair. Unlike most of her contemporaries, Klara is even able to experience a period of complete freedom and control when she “regains” the ability to walk, though this liberation lasts for only a moment, up in the Alps, away from society and its expectations of her as an upper-middle-class female.

Though invalidism was physically debilitating to those who suffered from it, Price-Herndl points out, it was nevertheless considered to be a romantic, desirable quality for women, for it highlighted their fragility, helplessness, and dependency on their male counterparts: “The figure of the invalid woman at once unites the romantic

ideology of woman as 'body' (as opposed to man as 'mind'), the Victorian stereotype of woman as weak and delicate, and the bourgeois ideal of woman as 'conspicuous consumer' (who passively consumes since as an invalid she must be served at all times)" (10). And because it was considered by Victorian society to be so romantic and appealing, invalidism actually became a vogue trend for middle- and upper-middle-class women in the nineteenth-century, so much so that many healthy women even feigned illnesses, just to be considered fashionable. Price-Herndl posits, "many women's illnesses of the late nineteenth century could have been 'fashionable diseases,' that is, culturally accepted, expected, and even culturally induced" (22). She notes, "from the 1840s until the 1890s, women were increasingly defined as sickly and weak" (17), and the more sickly a woman appeared, the more fashionable and, therefore, desirable, she became. Furthermore, if women were not really sick, Price Herndl argues, society's high expectations of them were almost enough to make them ill: "I see patriarchal culture as potentially sickening for women and as defining women as inherently sick, especially when they resist its norms" (7). After all, "the cultural norms for women encouraged frailty and delicacy [...] The middle-class woman was encouraged from childhood to view herself as weaker and less healthy than her brothers" (23). Regardless of their physical or mental well-being, then, all women were thus in-validated by male-dominated Victorian society, simply because of their gender.

Jane Wood also analyzes the position of women in the nineteenth-century, comparing the idealization of the 'angel in the house' with the marginalization of ill females. She asserts that the Victorian perceptions of female invalids were problematic, at best: "The sum of elements from popular myth and medical science was a perception

of woman which seemed unproblematically to mingle a self-evidently idealized image of an ‘angel in the house’ and a reality of permanent invalidism” (9). This ‘angel in the house’ concept was very appealing to male-dominated Victorian society, and was strongly encouraged for all females, healthy or not:

ideas about moral management and the centrality of doctrines of domestication were exerting a powerful force, not only in public institutions such as asylums but also in the social institutions of marriage and the home. The idealization of woman as the morally pure, passive, ‘angel in the house’ worked to make a virtue of a social prescription and thereby served an expedient need. (9)

But the actual physical debilitation of the feminine invalid was not really taken into account, Wood argues, since illness was considered to be such a natural condition for females: “women were designated as medical problems by their very nature” (5). She asserts, “women were held to be locked in a constant round of chronic sickness” (20-1), simply because of their gender and the stereotypes and social expectations accompanying it.

Colin Craven, Mary Lennox, Klara Sesemann, and Phineas Fletcher

My first chapter in this thesis examines *The Secret Garden*’s young male invalid, Colin Craven, in consideration of Jane Wood and Diane Price-Herndl’s studies of the feminizing effects of illness and James Adams’s discussion of Victorian masculinity. As an invalid, Colin’s social contact is limited to only his servants and doctors, limitations which undermine the development of conventional class relations, the legitimacy of his status, and his very masculinity. Adams’s concept of the

gentleman's body thus applies both figuratively and literally to Colin, whose 'miracle cure' is driven by his desire to assert himself, for it is his gardener's criticism of his illness that prompts him to rise from his wheelchair, thereby reaffirming both his masculinity and social status.

Chapter Two focuses on two female perspectives of class and illness, demonstrated by Colin's cousin Mary and the invalid Klara in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, both of whom simultaneously uphold and breach social boundaries. Their respective illnesses and isolation force the girls to become playmates with lower-class children. Society does not object to these external friendships because their illnesses and gender already marginalize the girls; a double standard of social interaction is thus created for the girls and Colin, who refuses to make friends with his social inferiors. Mary is further marginalized by her inability to exert any authority over the servants, despite her social superiority, whereas Klara preserves the little social standing she does have by remaining distant and authoritative with her household employees.

The final chapter of my thesis discusses the liminality of Phineas Fletcher in Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Phineas is a much more complex character than Colin, Mary, and Klara, for Craik's novel spans the whole of Phineas's adult life, while Burnett and Spyri's novels present a much shorter time frame (only a few months in *The Secret Garden*, and two years in *Heidi*). We are thus given a fuller description of Phineas's life and experiences; whereas the other children discussed in this thesis are all cured of their respective ailments in a relatively short time, Phineas remains ill for the rest of his life, thereby perpetuating his marginalization and invalidation. He is also older than Colin, Klara, and Mary; at the beginning of *John Halifax*

Gentleman, Phineas is sixteen years old, and is thus on the verge of adulthood², though several factors in his life prevent him from ever being considered “grown up.”

Like Colin, Phineas’s social position and masculinity are threatened by his invalidism. Yet unlike Burnett’s protagonist, Phineas never was the master of the household and was never able to assert any authority, even over his housekeeper. Additionally, he shows no concern whatsoever for social conventions, blatantly ignoring both his father and housekeeper’s snobbish exhortations in favour of his socially-inferior friend. And while Colin eventually overcomes his difficulties and becomes a thoroughly valid character, Phineas, on the other hand, stays sickly, and thus becomes the most marginal and in-valid figure discussed in this thesis. Phineas never becomes James Adams’s masculine gentleman and, instead, remains the epitome of Price-Herndl’s “unmanned” man.

Notes

¹It is interesting to note that John Halifax, too, is unable to attend boarding school, though, unlike Phineas, John's reasons are purely financial, not medical. But despite his lack of a boarding school education, John nevertheless becomes the quintessential Victorian gentleman, relying instead upon his experience in the other masculine arena, the workforce.

²A further explanation of my reasoning for discussing Phineas after the other children is given in the Conclusion.

1

“If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan’t live”
- Colin Craven in *The Secret Garden*

“An imaginary ailment is worse than a disease.”

- Yiddish Proverb

The Secret Garden is an important work to consider when studying childhood infirmity in the Victorian era, for the novel contains not one, but two young in-valids, a male and a female, and thus provides a unique interpretation of illness and of the lives of the young sufferers. In this chapter, I will examine *The Secret Garden*’s young male invalid, Colin Craven, using Jane Wood and Diane Price-Herndl’s studies of the feminizing effects of illness and James Adams’s discussion of Victorian masculinity. I will also analyze the implications which the incompatibility of illness and masculinity have on the boy, in light of conventional middle-class ideals. Confined to bed as a sickly invalid, Colin’s social contact is limited to only his servants and doctors, limitations which undermine the development of conventional class relations, the legitimacy of his status, and his very masculinity. He is socially marginalized by his unwillingness to leave his room, which results in a lack of real authority over the servants of Misselthwaite Manor. They, in turn, gradually lose any respect they may have had for their young master, with some of them referring to him contemptuously as a “cripple” or “hunchback,” disregarding the fact that he is a gentleman’s son. The boy is further marginalized by the feminizing effects of his illness, which leave him weak, pale, and thin, and confined to his home, the traditionally feminine domain. Colin is thus forced to live, as Price-Herndl describes, a “conventionally feminine” life, for he is physically unable to partake in any of the conventional “manly” activities. Adams

points out that ‘conservative commentators’ insist that “the gentleman’s status [...] derives from, and is made visible in, his body” (152). This notion applies both figuratively and literally to Colin, whose ‘miracle cure’ at the end of the novel is driven by his desire to assert himself to his servants; after all, it is his gardener’s criticism of his illness that prompts him to rise from his wheelchair and walk, thereby reaffirming both his masculinity and social status.

Colin’s unique circumstances are not entirely his fault; his father inadvertently created the situation shortly after the boy was born, upon the death of Mrs. Craven. A hunchback himself, Archibald Craven developed a morbid fear that his son would become kyphotic as well. Over time, the boy inherited his father’s fear, and admits to Mary, “If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan’t live. My father hates to think I may be like him” (Burnett 127). Colin loathes the idea himself, even though, as Martha explains, he “isn’t [a hunchback] yet. [...] But he began all wrong” (140). In response to Mr. Craven’s fears, Colin was not allowed to be a ‘normal’ boy and was instead forced to become an invalid to prevent a hump from developing. He was subjected to a myriad of medical therapies, for every doctor consulted had a different opinion of how he should be treated¹: “He must not talk too much; he must not forget that he was ill; [and] he must not forget that he was very easily tired” (150). Colin tells Mary, “I have been taken to places at the seaside [for treatment] [...]. I used to wear an iron thing to keep my back straight, but a grand doctor came from London to see me and said it was stupid. He told them to take it off and keep me out in the fresh air” (128). But, as one critic argues, such treatments were actually detrimental to the boy’s well-being: “Colin,

[began to suffer] from the damaging effects of the kind of iatrogenic medical care that kept a healthy child an invalid in order to validate the doctors' own expertise" (Messenger Davies 513). Lois Keith expounds on this: "All his life, Colin has been the victim of out-dated, inappropriate medicine. The family doctor [...] keeps him lying down, sometimes entrapped in a big, useless back brace" (133). Indeed, Colin really is the victim of his doctors' whims; after all, excluding the "grand" doctor from London, all of his physicians insist that the boy remain confined to bed to prevent damage to his back, even though there were no physical signs whatsoever of a hump developing. Colin, then, becomes marginalized since he is not allowed to develop like a normal boy.

Just as there is a debate about whether Colin actually is or will become a hunchback, there is also uncertainty surrounding his other illnesses. After years of eavesdropping on his doctors and nurses, the boy becomes hypochondriacal and starts to self-diagnose would-be illnesses. Martha tells Mary, "one time they took him out where the roses is by the fountain. He'd been readin' in a paper about people gettin' somethin' he called 'rose cold' an' he began to sneeze [...]. He cried himself into a fever an' was ill all night" (Burnett 141-2) with this mysterious 'disease.' Ironically, his nervousness at catching diseases was so serious that he often worried himself into fits, despite the lack of any symptoms, and the result was that he actually caused himself to be sick, as "he was ill and feverish, as he always was after he had worn himself out with a fit of crying" (183). His nurse even admits that 'Hysterics and temper are half what ails him" (170).² However, as Martha tells Mary, the boy has good reason to fret:

He's had coughs an' colds that's nearly killed him two or three times. Once he

had rheumatic fever an' once he had typhoid. Eh! Mrs. Medlock did get a fright then. He'd been out of his head an' she was talkin' to th' nurse, thinkin' he didn't know nothing', an' she said, 'He'll die this time sure enough, an' best thing for him an' for everybody. [...] He's weak and hates th' trouble o' bein' taken out o' doors, an' he gets cold so easy he says it makes him ill. (141)

Being prone to such incapacitating and life-threatening illnesses is terrifying to Colin, and justly so. It is, therefore, understandable that his doctors and even Colin himself wish him to be confined to bed to prevent the contraction of further sicknesses, both real and imagined.

Accordingly, Colin's confinement to bed is really a sort of incarceration: "the invalid is trapped in a routine and unstimulating home, unable to escape, with all options closed off" (Price-Herndl 182), and so becomes completely isolated from society. Colin's social contact, therefore, is limited to the people who have access to his bedroom: his doctors, nurses, and servants, none of whom are suitable companions for a ten-year old boy. Moreover, even if he were not bedridden, Colin would still be isolated from society due to the remote location of his home on the Yorkshire moors, several miles from the nearest village. As a result of this lonely isolation and non-interaction with the outside world, Colin's education is not what it should be: "he had not learned things as other children had. One of his nurses had taught him to read when he was quite little" (Burnett 129). He was physically unable to attend a boarding school like other boys of his age and wealth, and was too sickly to have a proper private tutor. His days, therefore, are spent "always reading and looking at pictures in splendid books" (129), alone in his room. Mary's sudden appearance, then, is startling and

difficult for him to accept as anything other than a dream: ““You [Mary] are real, aren't you?” he said. ‘I have such real dreams very often. You might be one of them. [...] I don't want it to be a dream’” (126-8). Once he has determined that Mary is, in fact, a real human being, Colin proceeds to ask her a myriad of questions, just to hear a voice other than his own:

He wanted to know how long she had been at Misselthwaite; he wanted to know which corridor her room was on; he wanted to know what she had been doing; if she disliked the moor as he disliked it; where she had lived before she came to Yorkshire. She answered all these questions and many more and he lay back on his pillow and listened. He made her tell him a great deal about India and about her voyage across the ocean. (130)

This new presence becomes a desperate obsession for Colin, for Mary is the only other child he knows and the only friend he has. Living vicariously through her, Colin's days are no longer dreary and monotonous; her frequent visits to his room shatter the lonely isolation which has haunted him his whole life.

Invalid-ation

In addition to creating isolation, Colin's invalidism also destabilizes the standard relationship between master and servant at Misselthwaite Manor; in turn, this, along with Archibald Craven's frequent absence and apathy, undermines Colin's ability to develop appropriate class relations. Sickly and unable to walk on his own, Colin is in a socially awkward situation: he has inherited a position of power and authority over his lower-class servants, yet he, as an invalid, is totally dependent on these servants for

even the most menial of daily activities. As well, Colin is unwilling to venture out of his room and, as Martha tells Mary, “Mr. Craven, he won’t be troubled about anythin’ when he’s here, an’ he’s nearly always away” (26); therefore, no one is able to establish anything which resembles conventional class relations in the manor. The servants, then, have much more independence and free reign in the house, and this collapse of the standard Victorian master/servant dynamic is especially beneficial to the young housemaid, Martha:

If there was a grand Missus at Misselthwaite I should never have been even one of th’ under house-maids. I might have been let to be scullerymaid but I’d never have been let upstairs. I’m too common an’ I talk too much Yorkshire. But this is a funny house for all it’s so grand. Seems like there’s neither master nor mistress except Mr. Pitcher [Mr. Craven’s manservant] and Mrs. Medlock [the housekeeper]. [...] Mrs. Medlock gave me th’ place out o’ kindness. She told me she could never have done it if Misselthwaite had been like other big houses.

(25-6)

The employees, therefore, have much more freedom and authority at Misselthwaite Manor than was the norm in Victorian society - and they know it. Because there is no ‘grand Missus’ or even a ‘grand Master’ to exert authority over them, the servants could be rather impudent; the narrator tells us, “If Martha had been a well-trained fine young lady’s maid she would have been more subservient and respectful and would have known that it was her business to brush hair, and button boots, and pick things up and lay them away. She was, however, only an untrained Yorkshire rustic” (29-31), whose impudence was the result not of a malevolent personality, but ignorance and the lack of

a 'grand Missus' to set her straight. Thus, the standard relationship between master and servant at Misselthwaite Manor are clearly destabilized by Colin's invalidism and his father's absence and apathy. This inability to establish conventional relations with the servants is especially problematic for Colin; he was already pushed to the social margins on account of his illnesses and physical disability, but it is his lack of any real authority over his servants that socially cripples him, for the creation of such authority can only occur when and if Colin recovers from his diseases.

Even more significant than the weakening of conventional class relations is the undermining of the legitimacy of Colin's status as the son of a wealthy gentleman. The marginality which resulted from his inability to establish proper social dynamics with his servants was magnified whenever he ventured out for treatment, for he required a noticeably large, cumbersome wheelchair which, naturally, drew attention to his invalidism. Such negative interest would be uncomfortable for anyone, but it was especially so for male invalids like Colin; as James Adams points out, society was replete with "'manly' praise of the male body as an object of aesthetic delight, a celebration that culminates in the rhapsodies of Victorian athleticism" (153). Feeble and confined to bed or a wheelchair, Colin is the antithesis to this idealized athletic figure whom he himself idolizes (as represented in the novel by Dickon); Colin is naturally embarrassed at his situation and so becomes an oddity, a "freak show," a spectacle at which people would stare and point whenever he ventured out into public:

I always hated it [...] even when I was very little. Then when they took me to the seaside and I used to lie in my carriage, everybody used to stare and ladies would stop and talk to my nurse and then they would begin to whisper, and I

knew when they were saying I shouldn't live to grow up. Then sometimes the ladies would pat my cheeks and say 'Poor child!' (Burnett 153)

This pity is doubly humiliating for Colin, not only because it is an embarrassing, public recognition of his invalidism, but also since it comes from women, marginalized figures themselves; such feminine sympathy unwittingly and publicly destroys the boy's ego and pushes him even further into the periphery of society. Understandably, this is an uncomfortable and awkward position for the boy; despite his father's good name and high social standing, Colin is not publicly admired or respected as he wishes, but instead is pitied and ridiculed by all who see him.

The legitimacy of Colin's status as the son of a wealthy gentleman, then, is publicly damaged by his illness. Not surprisingly, he becomes sensitive and nervous about people staring at him, an anxiety which eventually leads to his refusal to venture outside his room, lest he should be seen by others and criticized for his disability. This even applies within his own house, for the servants refused to inform him of Mary's arrival (and even her very existence), since they knew he would not like her to see him. When they eventually do meet, he quickly tells Mary of this stigma:

"Tell me your name again."

"Mary Lennox. Did no one ever tell you I had come to live here?"

He [Colin] was still fingering the fold of her wrapper, but he began to look a little more as if he believed in her reality.

"No," he answered. "They daren't."

"Why?" asked Mary.

"Because I should have been afraid you would see me. I won't let people

see me and talk me over.” (127)

His refusal to allow others to stare at him is an attempt at earning the respect he desires as the son of a gentleman or, at the very least, an effort to retain what little dignity he has left. But, as Adams explains, this is a difficult task for an invalid, for an aesthetic and athletic male body is a vital component of the concept of a ‘gentleman’: “the gentleman [is represented] as an organic ideal, rooted above all in an innate, physiological sensibility. The gentleman’s status thus derives from, and is made visible in, his body” (152). By this conventional definition, then, a male invalid like Colin could never be considered a “true” gentleman on account of his physical frailty, even if he possesses other required qualities such as compassion, intelligence and wealth.

Imperialism And Imperialist Behaviour

However, Colin stubbornly refuses to admit his diminished social power, even to himself, and does his best to remain as authoritative as possible with his servants and the lower-classes, to show them who is boss - literally. This power comes from his father, who tries his best to help his son retain some credibility with the servants by prohibiting the staff from discussing his son’s conditions: “My father won’t let people talk me over, either. The servants are not allowed to speak about me” (Burnett 127). Furthermore, Mr. Craven not only provides his son with financial means, but is frequently absent and insists to the servants that the boy “could have anything he asked for and was never made to do anything he did not like to do” (129) while he was away.³ Colin eagerly takes full advantage of his father’s commands, and repeatedly emphasizes his power to Mary: “Everyone is obliged to please me [...]. They all know that” (131).

Indeed, the servants all do their best to please the boy, for they know that he will throw a fierce temper tantrum and work himself into a feverish fit if his wishes are not met: “He’s a big lad to cry like a baby, but when he’s in a passion he’ll fair scream just to frighten us” (139). Accordingly, Colin develops into a spoiled child whose orders are mainly the result of his childish behaviour, rather than a conscious consideration of his duties and responsibilities as a young master of the house. Even Mary realizes that “one of Colin’s chief peculiarities was that he did not know in the least what a rude little brute he was with his way of ordering people about. He had lived on a sort of desert island all his life and as he had been the king of it he had made his own manners and had had no one to compare himself with” (233). The pleasures this tyrannical supremacy gives invalids was acknowledged by Charles Lamb, who wrote from personal experience in an 1833 essay: “If there be regal solitude, it is in the sick bed. How the patient lords it there; what caprices he acts without controul [sic]. [...] How sickness enlarges the dimensions of a man’s self to himself! he is his own exclusive object. Supreme selfishness is inculcated upon him as his only duty. [...] To be sick is to enjoy monarchal prerogatives” (“The Convalescent”). This definition certainly applies to Colin but, as Lois Keith points out, there is a negative aspect of such supremacy: “Colin, at the beginning of the book, is as authoritarian and controlling as any monarch, but there is no pleasure for him in his isolated kingdom” (127), since he realizes that the servants only obey him at his father’s and doctors’ commands, rather than out of respect for the boy himself.

Yet Colin’s behaviour changes dramatically and instantaneously when he meets Mary. For the first time in his life, there is someone in his house who is not under his

command, someone who can (and does) stand up to him, and someone who is his social equal.⁴ He sees that Martha respects Mary and her social status and is, more importantly, actually in awe of her.⁵ With such an equal around, Colin now more than ever feels the importance of commanding the same awe from his servants that Mary does, in addition to their mere obedience. Under her influence, Colin begins to believe in his authority and credibility as a young gentleman, and begins to act accordingly; his orders immediately change from those of a spoiled, selfish child into those of an authoritative young lord of the house. He begins to react when the servants are impertinent, flatly telling the gardener, "Weatherstaff, [...] that is disrespectful" (Burnett 246). But Colin's dramatic transformation is most evident when Martha discovers that Mary has met Colin; the young maid is terrified that Mrs. Medlock will dismiss her for allowing the meeting to take place. However, with his new-found self-assurance, Colin quickly and firmly puts an end to Martha's doubts of his authority:

"Have you to do what I please or have you not?" he demanded.

"I have to do what you please, sir," Martha faltered, turning quite red.

"Has Medlock to do what I please?"

"Everybody has, sir," said Martha.

"Well, then, if I order you to bring Miss Mary to me, how can Medlock send you away if she finds it out?"

"Please don't let her, sir," pleaded Martha.

"I'll send her away if she dares to say a word about such a thing," said Master Craven grandly. "She wouldn't like that, I can tell you."

"Thank you, sir," bobbing a curtsy, "I want to do my duty, sir."

“What I want is your duty” said Colin more grandly still. “I’ll take care of you. Now go away.” (143)

Significantly, the narrator, too, comments on the change in his attitude, ironically describing his ‘grand’ behaviour and referring to him sarcastically as “Master Craven.” And Colin later erases whatever doubts may have been left about his authority by bluntly telling the servants, “I’m your master [...] when my father is away. And you are to obey me” (226). These are not the orders of spoiled, selfish child in the midst of a temper tantrum, and they serve as an effective indication that Colin is maturing into the authoritative young man he ought to be.

His new masterful attitude reflects the imperial nature of British colonialism, which was still in practice the year *The Secret Garden* was published (1911). Imperialism is, in fact, an important part of this novel; Mary Lennox has seen it first hand, having grown up in India where she was raised by her family’s native servants and where her “father had held a position under the English Government” (1). She tries to apply what she experienced in India to her new life in England⁶, comparing and contrasting everything. Colin’s ‘grand’ behaviour towards his servants is especially intriguing for Mary, for she connects him to a dictatorial prince: “Once in India I saw a boy who was a rajah. He had rubies and emeralds and diamonds stuck all over him. He spoke to his people just as you spoke to Martha. Everybody had to do everything he told them - in a minute. I think they would have been killed if they hadn’t” (144). When, much to Martha’s horror, Mrs. Medlock does find out that Mary and Colin have met, “Mary was reminded of the boy Rajah again. Colin answered as if neither the doctor’s alarm nor Mrs. Medlock’s terror were of the slightest consequence. He was as

little disturbed or frightened as if an elderly cat and dog had walked into the room”

(149). Moreover, the boy is fascinated by Mary’s tales of the rajah, and quickly adapts his own mannerisms to reflect his idea of how a prince behaves. When Colin ventures out of his room for the first time, he gathers all of his servants and grandly instructs them to stay away from the garden while he is there; he then turns to Mary and asks her how a rajah would dismiss his staff:

“What is that thing you say in India when you have finished talking and want people to go?”

“You say, ‘You have my permission to go,’” answered Mary.

The rajah waved his hand.

“You have my permission to go, [...]” he said. (208-9)

Such hand-waving becomes an enjoyable habit for him, and he does it so frequently and imperiously that Mary feels that his “thin hand [...] ought really to have been covered with royal signet rings made of rubies” (194), just like the Indian boy-prince. This comparison is sustained throughout the novel: his behaviour often reminds Mary of the rajah, and both the narrator and one of gardeners, Mr. Roach, make sarcastic comments about Colin’s new attitude: the gardener tells Mrs. Medlock, “he’s got a fine, lordly way with him, hasn’t he? You’d think he was a whole Royal Family rolled into one - Prince Consort and all” (209). But Colin even emulates the rajah when he is not giving orders, such as when he is brought out to the secret garden: “A wheeled-chair with luxurious cushions and robes [...] came towards him [Weatherstaff] looking rather like some sort of state coach because a young rajah leaned back in it with royal command in his great, black-rimmed eyes and a thin white hand extended haughtily towards him” (223).

Colin, then, looks and acts very much like a young rajah being driven about by his boy-servant, Dickon.

Historians Gerard Siarny and Manan Ahmed argue that this is a natural comparison to make, given the nature of English imperialism, especially in Asia:

British leaders sought out allies among ‘natural aristocracies’ - [...] rajahs, sultans and other princely rulers in India [...] - and based their imperial government on what they believed to be the traditional authority of these leaders. Not only did reliance on ‘traditional’ power structures provide an economical form of empire, it was congenial to the hierarchical tendencies of members of the British ruling class who believed they saw their social equals in local elites.

Though not in India, Colin is equated with Mary’s rajah, a comparison which the boy clearly enjoys and encourages. His ‘miracle cure’ only bolsters his prince-like attitude, as Lois Keith explains: “Within minutes he walks to the tree and with the imperious anger of someone who knows he is speaking to his social inferior, he commands Ben to look at him” (137). Given Colin’s previous aversion to scrutiny, such a command is significant, and Ben Weatherstaff recognizes, once and for all, that Colin really is healthy and really is his social superior. Thus, “Colin replicates imperial maneuvers when he assumes control at the end of the book” (McGillis 439), leaving no doubt about his authority and ability to command. As one historian summarizes, nineteenth-century European imperialism “had a temper uniquely masterful and remorseless, brooking no obstacles and pushfully self-assertive” (Rempel), a description which accurately reflects Colin’s imperialist and rajah-like attitude and behaviour towards his lower-class

servants.

Effeminacy And Feminization of Illness

Even before readers discover that Colin is an invalid, it is clear from his initial behaviour and physical characteristics that there is something not quite right about him. The first time we see Colin, he is lying in bed, crying pathetically, and acting in a thoroughly unacceptable manner for a boy, especially so for one of his age. His overall appearance, as well, is not masculine at all, but rather is very feminine:

The boy had a sharp, delicate face, the colour of ivory, and he seemed to have eyes too big for it. He had also a lot of hair which tumbled over his forehead in heavy locks and made his face seem smaller. He looked like a boy who had been ill [...] Mary could not help noticing what strange eyes he had. They were agate-grey and they looked too big for his face because they had black lashes all around them. (Burnett 125)

This is not a description which would apply to Adams' healthy, robust, masculine gentleman; rather, Colin's pale complexion, large eyes and thick lashes are conventionally feminine qualities and, consequently, make the boy appear effeminate and weak. Keith concurs: "Throughout the period of Colin's illness his appearance is feminine and romantic" (137), not masculine. Moreover, Colin is described as being the 'spitting image' of his late mother: "She had [...] gay, lovely eyes [that] were exactly like Colin's unhappy ones, agate-grey and looking twice as big as they really were, because of the black lashes all around them" (Burnett 135). Dickon tells Mary that Colin's eyes were "just like his mother's eyes, only hers was always laughin' [...].

They say as Mr. Craven can't bear to see him when he's awake an' it's because his eyes is so like his mother's'" (161). Thus, Colin is further isolated from his father, the sole masculine presence in his life, whom he does not resemble, apart for a potentially humped back. The boy's marginality, then, is increased on account of his physical similarity to his mother, and he seems doomed to remain effeminate for the rest of his life.

But Colin is also feminized by both the physical encumbrances and the very nature of his illness. The Victorians idolized the masculine athlete and, for many, the male body was a thing of beauty: "[it was] an object of celebration and desire - a project recognized in the contemporary tag, 'Apostle of the Flesh'" (Adams 150). In this society, then, illness was considered a weakness and ill males were considered effeminate oddities. Colin was such an oddity, with his fear of the outdoors and inability to exercise leaving him pale and feeble, with a very small appetite, no energy whatsoever, and a total dependency on his servants. He was also painfully skeletal, with "a poor, thin back to look at when it was bared. Every rib could be counted and every joint of the spine" (Burnett 177). The boy is, therefore, the complete opposite of the idealized muscular athlete, and Colin's effeminacy is further revealed when he is considered in light of Adams' discussion of the lives of average middle-class boys:

The separation of home and workplace, and the increasingly rigorous gendering of that division, led to a growing isolation of middle-class fathers from their sons, who in their early years were immersed in a sphere increasingly designated 'feminine,' and then - in a phenomenon unparalleled elsewhere in Europe - transported to the all-male environment of boarding schools [...]. (5)

As an invalid, Colin was unable to attend the 'masculine' boarding school, remaining instead in the 'feminine sphere' at home, isolated from his frequently absent father. Colin, therefore, is left without a real masculine presence in, or influence on, his life, and is surrounded, instead, by female nurses and servants. Adams further notes that some nineteenth-century critics of Victorian society placed great importance on the physical attributes of a gentleman: "[they] increasingly represent the gentleman as an organic ideal, rooted above all in an innate, physiological sensibility. The gentleman's status thus derives from, and is made visible in, his body" (152). It was, therefore, difficult for many Victorians to accept someone like Colin in society because of his disabilities and the fact that he is confined to home, the feminine domain; hence, "the invalid is described as, if not feminine, certainly not masculine; he is unmanned" (Price-Herndl 181). Thus, the effete Colin could not be considered a true gentleman by conventional Victorian standards, because his masculinity is undermined by the very nature of his illnesses and disabilities.

Consequently, as Lois Keith explains, "he is not like a boy from a 'boy's book.' His illness feminizes him and makes him petulant and subject to passionate but useless outbursts. He is the victim of his emotions" (137), therefore, rather than a 'manly' master of reason. These emotional outbreaks are, as mentioned earlier, the result of hysterics: "He had never told any one but Mary that most of his 'tantrums,' as they called them, grew out of his hysterical hidden fear" (Burnett 172). Hysteria is a condition which was traditionally "thought to occur more frequently in women than in men and to be associated with the womb" ("Hysterical"); the root, 'hystero-' literally means 'of the uterus' ("Hystero-"). Therefore, by etymology, hysteria is a disease of

females, not males, and the fact that Colin is a male sufferer of this disease adds to his feminization and marginalization: “representations of male nervousness [...] fashioned an image of an invalid feminized by the very nature of his disease” (Wood 60). Colin, like other male invalids, is thus in an awkward social position; he is “a social, sexual, and psychological anomaly in a culture of robust and resolute manliness” (60).

Heal Thyself: Reaffirmation And Revalidation

As stated earlier, many of Colin’s problems were imaginary, the result of temper tantrums or baseless fears inherited from his father. The ‘miracle cure’ he experiences, then, is not so much a ‘cure’ as a realization and confirmation of what Mary had been insisting all along. She never subscribed to his hypochondriac fears, and regularly expressed her doubts about his ‘hunched’ back and inability to walk, telling him flatly, “There’s nothing the matter with your horrid back - nothing but hysterics!” (Burnett 177). To prove it to him, she examines his back and, as expected, finds no humps or lumps whatsoever. His nurse confirms this fact, telling Mary that “His back is weak because he won’t try to sit up. I could have told him there was no lump there” (178-9). These statements, and the impact they have on Colin, prove to be the first ‘step’ in his ‘miracle cure’:

No one but Colin himself knew what effect those crossly spoken childish words had on him. If he had ever had anyone to talk to about his secret terrors - [...] if he had had childish companions and had not lain on his back in the huge closed house, [...] he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself. [...] And now that an angry, unsympathetic little girl

insisted obstinately that he was not at all as he thought he was he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth. (178)

This realization is the most important aspect of Colin's 'recovery,' for he himself now believes that he may actually live to be a perfectly healthy adult, rather than dying young or developing a hunch. His new, positive state of mind is encouraged by his exposure to the garden, for it was precisely what the 'grand doctor from London' had prescribed but which Colin was previously too terrified to experience. As the boy enters the garden's enclosed walls and takes it all in for the first time, the first words he speaks are a jubilant exclamation of his greatest hope, which now seems sure to come true: "I shall get well! I shall get well! [...] 'Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live for ever and ever and ever!'" (214).

While this new attitude and fresh air help prepare him for his recovery, it is ultimately his indignity at the impudence and criticism of a social inferior that prompts Colin actually to rise from his wheelchair and walk for the first time. The gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, accidentally discovers the young trio working in the secret garden and scolds them for intruding, impudently referring to Colin as 'the cripple' with the 'crooked legs.' That was the final insult Colin could bear, for "Never yet had he been accused of crooked legs - even in whispers - and the perfectly simple belief in their existence which was revealed by Ben Weatherstaff's voice was more than rajah flesh and blood could endure" (224-225). Colin's horror quickly turns to anger, which he uses to his advantage:

The strength which Colin usually threw into his tantrums rushed through him now in a new way. [...] There was a brief, fierce scramble, the rugs were tossed

on the ground, Dickon held Colin's arm, the thin legs were out, the thin feet were on the grass. Colin was standing upright - upright - as straight as an arrow and looking strangely tall - his head thrown back and his strange eyes flashing lightning.

'Look at me!' he flung up at Ben Weatherstaff. 'Just look at me - you! Just look at me!'

'He's as straight as I am,' cried Dickon. 'He's as straight as any lad i' Yorkshire!' (224-225)

All of Weatherstaff's doubts concerning Colin's health are thereby erased and he immediately and humbly recognizes Colin's authority, bowing his head and asking forgiveness for his impudence and ignorance. It is important to note, too, that, for the first time in his young life, Colin actually wants people to stare at him: "'Look at me!' he commanded. 'Look at me all over! Am I a hunchback? Have I got crooked legs?'" (228). The answer is clear and, as Lois Keith explains, "This walking because of hurt pride is the first 'step' in Colin's important journey towards a state of 'upright' masculinity" (137), for there is an obvious ethical implication associated with the term:

'Straight' and 'upright' means honest, honourable, frank and trustworthy. To describe someone, particularly a man, as completely 'straight' in the context of character is always positive [...]. When Dickon, the most dependable, honest boy in all of Yorkshire, declares that 'Colin is as straight as I am,' he is not just referring to the shape of his backbone. (137-8).

Colin understandably revels in his moment of triumph, realizing that he has finally validated himself and reaffirmed the legitimacy of his status, albeit to one servant, but it

is no less enjoyable, and he is well on his way to becoming the 'straight' and masculine gentleman he had always hoped to be.

To assist his recovery, Colin begins a scientific 'experiment,' using a local boxer's athletic workout, as demonstrated to the young master by Dickon, to strengthen his feeble, under-used muscles. The callisthenics prove to be so effective and enjoyable to him that, "From that time the exercises were part of the day's duties" (Burnett 258). Even on rainy days, when he could not work outside in the garden, Colin spends hours practicing inside abandoned rooms in the manor with Mary taking over the role of personal trainer. The boy tries to make up for lost time by doing as many exercises as possible: "I am going to run from one end of the gallery to the other," he said, "and then I am going to jump and then we will do Bob Haworth's [the boxer] exercises" (266). Accordingly, his appetite becomes voracious which, in turn, gives him more energy to exercise, and he quickly grows fatter and stronger. The results are so impressive, in fact, that Colin exclaims, "Now [...] I am a real boy" (264) and expresses his sheer delight at his extraordinary recovery: "I'm *well* - I'm *well*! [...] I shall live for ever and ever and ever!" (271) Ben Weatherstaff, too, is impressed, and demonstrates his complete reversal of opinion about his young master, telling Colin, "We shall have thee takin' to boxin' in a week or so [...] Tha'lt end wi' winnin' th' Belt an' bein' champion prize-fighter of all England" (246). Yet Colin decides not to be a professional athlete, preferring instead to become an academic, based on the success of his 'experiment': "I shall not be a prize-fighter. I shall be a Scientific Discoverer" (246). Nevertheless, the boy's active, aggressive transformation is thus complete; he is no longer Price-Herndl's sickly little feminine invalid, but is rather the epitome of Adams' healthy, athletic,

masculine young man which was so praised by Victorian society.

Colin's reaffirmation and validation culminates in the revelation of his secret 'recovery' to his father, the man he revered above all others. His secret is revealed unexpectedly, as he literally runs into his father in the secret garden, surprising both of them: "This was not what Colin had expected - this was not what he had planned. He had never thought of such a meeting. And yet to come dashing out - winning a race - perhaps it was even better" (294-5). In fact, his transformation is so complete that the boy is initially unrecognizable to his father, for he was no longer the pale, effete little child of the first half of the novel, but is rather a healthy, robust young man, full of life and energy: "He was a tall boy and a handsome one. He was glowing with life, and his running had sent splendid colour leaping to his face. He threw the thick hair back from his forehead and lifted a pair of strange grey eyes - eyes full of boyish laughter and rimmed with black lashes like a fringe" (294). It is, indeed, 'boyish laughter,' not 'girlish' giggling, and it delights both father and son, for it symbolizes a healthy masculinity neither thought possible, and Colin, as Keith notes, "begins to become the 'real boy' his father never thought he could be" (137). Mr. Craven is visibly moved by the fact that his son is no longer invalid-ated by his diseases or back problems and is instead, a visibly healthy, active young man. Unable to contain himself any longer, Colin proudly reveals the source of his recovery:

'It was the garden that did it--and Mary and Dickon and the creatures-- and the Magic. No one knows. We kept it to tell you when you came. I'm well, I can beat Mary in a race. I'm going to be an athlete.'

He said it all so like a healthy boy--his face flushed, his words tumbling

over each other in his eagerness--that Mr. Craven's soul shook with unbelieving joy.

Colin put out his hand and laid it on his father's arm.

'Aren't you glad, Father?' he ended. 'Aren't you glad? I'm going to live forever and ever and ever!' (Burnett 295)

Naturally, his father is thrilled that his son, "The Athlete, the Lecturer, the Scientific Discoverer was a laughable, lovable, healthy young human thing" (296). This is a significant divulgence, for it reveals that Mr. Craven, like Colin himself, used to consider his son a wretched, sickly "inhuman" specimen. The boy, therefore, is now "worthy" of his father's attention and affection, and of the Victorian "'manly' praise of the male body as an object of aesthetic delight" (Adams 153). Colin's masculinity, then, is undoubtedly reaffirmed, both by his miraculous 'recovery' from his feminine illnesses and, more importantly, by his father's happy acknowledgment and approval.

The final revalidation as a (potential) gentleman occurs in the last two paragraphs of the novel, when the household servants see Colin walking for the first time. Colin and his friends had managed to keep his recovery and athleticism a secret from his servants, and he admits, "I dare say it will frighten them nearly into fits when they see me" (296). But this only made the secret more pleasurable, and he triumphantly declares that he will accompany his father back to the manor on foot, finally ready to reveal his secret to everyone:

When Mrs. Medlock looked she threw up her hands and gave a little shriek, and every man and woman servant within hearing bolted across the servants' hall and stood looking through the window with their eyes almost

starting out of their heads.

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 steadily as any boy in Yorkshire - Master Colin! (298).

This communal happiness is two-fold; the servants are obviously relieved that the boy is no longer ill, but they are also delighted that Colin has visibly grown-up, and is no longer the spoiled, selfish tyrant but rather, an authoritative young man. His validation as a young gentleman is thus complete, and is not only the result of his miraculous 'cure' or his new, respectably-authoritative attitude, but also by his father's recognition, which is visible to the servants as the boy is allowed to walk side by side with his father, as an equal. To the servants, Colin is now undeniably masculine, athletic and respectable, and has finally earned the respect and admiration of his social inferiors which he so desperately desired. When Colin first met Mary, he told her, "If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan't live" (127); yet he does live, and in a way he never thought possible: not as an in-valid hunchback as everyone feared, but as a healthy, masculine young man who successfully established conventional class relations at Misselthwaite Manor and validated himself as a young gentleman worthy of respect.

Notes

¹ The 1993 film, *The Secret Garden*, shows the boy having special baths and even receiving a sort of electric-shock therapy on his legs to assist his circulation, a vogue Victorian 'alternative' therapy which was, according to Halsted's Eclectic Medical Institute, "truly [...] magical in its efficacy, and is always sure to cure" ("Water Cure," *Worcester Women's History Project*). Despite this claim, however, it was not successful for Colin.

² Colin's hysterics will be examined in greater detail later in on in the chapter.

³ This may just be a doctor's orders or part of Mr. Craven's generous nature, but it might also be a sympathetic attempt to afford his son some of the respect and power he was unable to achieve as an invalid; Archibald Craven was, after all, considered a hunchback himself, and as such, would have experienced the same social contempt as Colin.

⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term "social equivalents" for Mary and Colin in a purely financial sense, as both children come from wealthy, upper middle-class families. Their social differences (gender and culture [England versus India]) will be discussed at length in Chapter Two.

⁵ This will be discussed at length in Chapter Two.

⁶ The differences between Mary's experiences in colonized India and imperial England (in particular, the contrast between the attitudes of the Indian natives and the English servants and her behaviour towards them) will be examined in Chapter Two.

2

“She will be ill because she is a woman ”

- Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* and Klara Sesemann in *Heidi*

“In order to change we must be sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

- Anonymous

As Colin's experience in *The Secret Garden* suggests, it was possible for sickly male Victorian children to overcome their illnesses (as well as the in-validation that accompanied the ailments) and assume their proper place in society. But invalid females, as members of the “weaker sex,” experienced greater difficulties than their male counterparts in validating themselves during this era which actually encouraged illness in women, as demonstrated by Colin's cousin Mary in *The Secret Garden* and the invalid Klara in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. Their respective illnesses and isolation force the girls to become playmates with lower-class children, their social inferiors; Colin, by contrast, refuses to make friends with his servants, remaining as superior and authoritative as possible in their presence. Society does not object to girls establishing these cross-class friendships because their illnesses and gender already marginalize them, thus creating a double standard of social interaction in which the girls' position is flexible, while Colin's, as master of the house, is rigid. Yet Mary and Klara simultaneously preserve the little social standing they do have by trying to remain distant and authoritative with their household servants. Mary, however, has difficulty accomplishing this in England, for she is an Anglo-Indian Other and lacks knowledge about British customs and culture. Most of the servants ignore her or are impudent with her, which undermines her social standing as the niece of the master of Misselthwaite

Manor. She is further marginalized by her close friendship with her maid, Martha, and by her lack of education concerning the role which Victorian females were expected to assume upon entering womanhood. Klara, on the other hand, is more successful in this venture, for her lower-class friend is not her servant, but a hired companion who is welcomed into her family as an equal. Despite her invalidism, Klara is nevertheless mobile, and is able to supervise her servants, though she, like her contemporaries, is forced to appeal to her father's authority to validate her own. And though both girls are 'cured' by the end of their respective novels, neither of them experiences a re-validation in society like Colin, simply because Victorian women were not accorded the same social powers and responsibilities as their male counterparts. Thus, as Price-Herndl asserts, 'Invalidism is [...] the term that best describes the cultural definition of women in the nineteenth century [...] and the ill woman's relation to power and her culture' (1).

Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*

Though not physically disabled like her cousin, Mary Lennox is, nevertheless, an unhealthy child when she first arrives at Misselthwaite Manor. Unlike Colin, Mary's illness is more a reaction to her surroundings and circumstances than actual disease (real or imagined). She is 'ill' the whole time she is in India, a result of parental neglect and the sweltering weather. We are told that "She had 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. [...] She was a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby" (Burnett 1). As she herself tells

Mr. Craven, "In India [...] I was always ill and tired, and it was so hot" (118). Her 'illness,' then, is mainly fatigue and lethargy resulting from the sweltering Indian weather, perhaps a feeble attempt at getting attention from her neglectful parents. Lois Keith observes, "Mary and Colin have both been 'sickly' from childhood. [...] Mary arrives at her new home unattractive and yellow as a result of being jaundiced and neglected" (121). But Mary quickly recovers and becomes quite healthy shortly after moving to England. After only a few days in Yorkshire, Mary develops a healthy appetite, and gets stronger and healthier from playing in the crisp English out-of-doors with Dickon: "I never liked it in India. It makes me hungry here, and I am getting fatter" (Burnett 117). Mrs. Medlock says of Mary, "She's begun to be downright pretty since she's filled out and lost her ugly little sour look. Her hair's grown thick and healthy looking and she's got a bright colour. The glummiest, ill-natured little thing she used to be, and now her and Master Colin laugh together like a pair of crazy young ones" (260). Her 'cure,' then, is not a miracle at all but is, rather, the expected result of returning from the listless colony to the vibrant 'motherland,' where Mary experiences affection for the first time, and feels affection for others.

Isolation And Invalidation

Out of the four lonely characters discussed in this thesis, Mary is certainly the most neglected, both in India and at her new home in England. She is actually accustomed to isolation: no one ever really wanted her, including her parents, who emotionally abused the girl by having her kept out of sight and out of mind. In fact, her mother "had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over

to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Memsahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible" (1). But even her nurse did not want Mary; the girl flatly tells Ben Weatherstaff, "My Ayah didn't like me" (40). Though there were other children around, both English and native, none of them liked Mary, either: "I have no friends at all, [...] I never had [...] and I never played with anyone" (40). The result of this neglect is that Mary turns into a 'sour,' unpleasant child who does not evoke sympathy in anyone, despite her unfortunate circumstances. When the cholera breaks out at her parents' home, Mary is forgotten about altogether and is literally left alone in the empty house for several days. Her parents "had died and been carried away in the night, and [...] the few native servants who had not died also had left the house as quickly as they could get out of it, none of them even remembering that there was a Missie Sahib" (7). Ironically, though, it is this total isolation from her family and servants that prevents her from catching the cholera herself, and her life is thus saved. But even her new foster family does not like her, calling her, 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary,' after the nursery rhyme, and they make arrangements as quickly as they can to send her to her uncle in England. Naturally, Mary begins to "wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her father and mother had been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to really be anyone's little girl. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken any notice of her" (12).

Mary's situation does not improve in England; in fact, she is more isolated now than she has ever been. On first arriving at Misselthwaite Manor, Mary is actually told by Mrs. Medlock that she will be desolate and lonely: "you mustn't expect that there

will be people to talk to you. You'll have to play about and look after yourself" (17). Indeed, there really is no one for Mary to talk to: "In this queer place one scarcely ever saw anyone at all. In fact, there was no one to see but the servants" (54), but they are all older than she and, for the most part, have nothing to do with her. She is thus confined to two dreary rooms in the manor, and everyday is sent outside to play by herself on the vast and empty estate. The nearest village is several miles away, and no one ever came to visit, for Mr. Craven was frequently absent, "and when he is at Misselthwaite he shuts himself up in the West Wing and won't let anyone but Pitcher [the butler] see him" (16). And though "Mrs. Medlock came and looked at her every day or two, [...] no one inquired what she [Mary] did or told her what to do" (54). At first, Mary enjoys this complete freedom, but her happiness quickly changes to sadness as she realizes that she is truly alone, for even in India, she had always had an Ayah around to entertain her:

[...] even a disagreeable little girl may be lonely, and the big closed house and big bare moor and big bare gardens had made this one feel as if there was no one left in the world but herself. If she had been an affectionate child, who had been used to being loved, she would have broken her heart, but even though she was 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary' she was desolate. (36-7)

Though accustomed to being on her own, Mary nevertheless experiences a new level of forlornness at Misselthwaite because, for the first time in her young life, no one is even around to ignore her.

In addition to not wanting her, most of the servants at Misselthwaite are also quite impertinent and disrespectful towards Mary, and serve to invalidate her status.

She is, undoubtedly, their social superior: her father was a wealthy, prominent government official, and her uncle is the master of Misselthwaite Manor, yet the fact remains that Mary is just a ten-year old female child, so, like the rest of the women in the Victorian era, she is not accorded much authority or even respect. Despite, or even in spite of, her social superiority, most of the servants either ignore Mary completely, or treat her with disdain and contempt; Ben Weatherstaff goes so far as to scold her for asking questions about the secret garden: "Don't be a meddling wench an' poke your nose where it's no cause to go" (43). Moreover, unlike Colin, Mary is referred to simply by her name or derogatorily as "Child," if even referred to at all, signifying her complete lack of status and respect within the Craven household; ironically, the only people who respectfully refer to her as "Miss Mary" are Dickon and Martha, her friends. Mary is further invalidated by the fact that she cannot even appeal to her uncle to establish her power because he is absent most of the time, and does not usually see her on the rare occasions that he is home. When he finally does see her, he does not grant her authority as he does his son, but instead tells Mary, "Mrs. Medlock is to see that you have all you need," (118) thereby giving the housekeeper, Mary's social inferior, all of the power. Furthermore, Mrs. Medlock is particularly scornful of Mary, and even becomes rather violent with the girl when Mary tells her that she heard someone (who, it is later revealed, is Colin) crying:

"You didn't hear anything of the sort," said the housekeeper. "You come along back to your own nursery or I'll box your ears."

And she took her by the arm and half pushed, half pulled her up one passage and down another, until she pushed her in at the door of her own room.

“Now,” she said, “you stay where you’re told to stay or you’ll find yourself locked up.” (58-9)

Mrs. Medlock could never have threatened Colin in such a way, but she is able to virtually ignore the fact that Mary is the master’s niece and her own social superior, because no one is able or willing to stop her. Thus, even though the boy is an actual invalid and therefore feminized and socially weakened, he still has more authority and validity than his healthy female cousin.

Class relations are further disrupted by Mary’s friendship with her two of her social inferiors: Martha and Dickon Sowerby. Such friendships are permissible because Mary is a female and therefore already marginalized in society, so her status is not really threatened. As discussed in Chapter One, Colin, too, becomes friendly with Dickon, but he upholds conventional class relations by remaining distant and authoritative with the social inferior; Mary, on the other hand, quickly befriends Martha and Dickon because she is desperate for companionship. Mary never intended to become friendly with her social inferiors, however, and tries to maintain conventional relations with them by initially resisting Martha’s overtures of friendship:

If Mary Lennox had been a child who was ready to be amused she would perhaps have laughed at Martha’s readiness to talk, but Mary only listened to her coldly and wondered at her freedom of manner. At first she was not at all interested, but gradually, as the girl rattled on in her good-tempered, homely way, Mary began to notice what she was saying. (31)

It does not take long for them to become friends, as Martha is also isolated and lonely at Misselthwaite: “she was very young, and used to a crowded cottage full of brothers and

sisters, and she found it dull in the great servants' hall downstairs" (48). Through Martha, Mary experiences friendship and love for the first time, becoming a sort of foster member of the Sowerby family. Martha's brother, Dickon, 'adopts' Mary in much the same way as he adopted his many pets, and she develops a close bond with him, as well: "Oh, how she did like that queer, common boy!" (122). As Lois Keith notes, "Mary's first real friends are the ordinary, lowly servants: Martha, the young servant girl who attends Mary, [and] her brother Dickon, a boy who can literally speak to the animals [...]. These are plain Yorkshire people who speak dialect, who don't know and don't care about fancy manners and [...] have hearts of gold" (123). Ultimately, any pretense of conventional class relations between them is effectively shattered when Mary begins speaking the local dialect to impress Dickon "because that was his language, and in India a native was always pleased if you knew his speech" (Burnett 109). Yet speaking in the Yorkshire tongue amuses Mary, so she begins to employ it on a regular basis, even in conversations with Colin. But speaking in this dialect also signifies her marginality and relationship with her inferiors, though Mary does not mind, because it also shows her respect and affection for Martha and Dickon, the first real family she has ever known.

Imperialism

As mentioned in Chapter One, British imperialism plays an important role in *The Secret Garden*; Mary was, of course, part of the English colonization of India, as her father was a captain in the British army and held an important position with the colonial government. Mary herself was born and raised in India and, in many ways, is

more native than English: her skin is not white but yellow, from both the Indian sun and illness, and she thus resembles a native more than a “proper” British girl. She has also been raised by a series of native Ayahs, rather than by her parents or British governesses; the girl, therefore, has learned more about native Indian life (songs, stories, and Magic) than she has about British customs and culture. Because of this close connection to the Indians, Mary even begins subconsciously to use native phrases in her everyday speech: “She said that very often - ‘It was the custom.’ The native servants were always saying it” (29). But most important is the fact that Mary treats her mother in much the same way that the native servants treat her, calling her “Memsahib”: “Mary used to call her that oftener than anything else” (3), because of both Mary’s connection to her native Ayahs and Mrs. Lennox’s maternal absence in Mary’s life. No one, then, has taught the girl anything about Britain or the British way of life, and she thus becomes what the Victorians referred to as an ‘Anglo-Indian’: “In Burnett’s days this term applied to the English living in India, not to a person of English and Asian mixed-blood ancestry as it now means. It is often said that through living in colonial India for a long time, Anglo-Indians, both children and adults, suffered from cultural ambiguity, dislocation, and deracination” (Kawabata 287). This is certainly true of Mary, and her awkward position makes her an Other and marginalizes her even more, for she is white but also native, British but also Indian, and imperial but also colonial. She accordingly does not really belong in either country.

Living in Britain, then, is understandably frustrating to Mary, because she cannot comprehend that she is the one who is out of place, and not the people she meets in Yorkshire. She is an Other who does not realize that she is strange and unfamiliar,

that she is just as foreign to England as the country is to her. As Lois Keith notes, “[Mary] has a sense of not belonging anywhere, of living in other people’s houses,” (123) and, indeed, other people’s countries. Though she had always considered herself British, and had been born to British parents, Mary is slowly beginning to realize that she had become much more native, or at least Anglo-Indian, than she could believe:

Mary Lennox is an English child born, and raised to nine years old, far from England’s shores. Her predicament is testing, beguiling; she is a foreigner who leaves home, which is not home, and returns, in a manner of speaking, to a native land she has never actually known. Little wonder, then, that the confusion of cultural values [...] radically disorients Mary’s sense of place in the world. (Philips 172)

Thus, as expected, Mary compares everything that happens to her in England to her former life in India, trying vainly to reconcile the differences: “‘It is different in India,’ said Mistress Mary disdainfully. She could scarcely stand this” (Burnett 27). A turning point is reached, though, when Martha said that she had expected the girl to be black, which infuriates Mary: “‘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 you. You know nothing about India. You know nothing about nothing!’” (27) As well as revealing Mary’s perceived racial superiority, this outburst also demonstrates that, although she does not yet understand the cultural differences between India and England, and continues to experience extreme ‘culture shock,’ Mary is, nevertheless, slowly realizing that she knows nothing about Britain and that she is the one who really ‘knows nothing about nothing.’

The most shocking difference Mary notices between her former life in India and her new home in England is the way the servants interact with her. Like Colin, Mary was totally dependent on her native servants to dress her, but Martha gently refuses to perform such a menial task: "It'll do thee good to wait on thysen a bit" (26). Mary is shocked, for in the colony, "Native servants always salaamed and submitted to you, whatever you did" (41). The girl is, therefore, accustomed to such deference and utter obeisance from her racial and social inferiors:

The native servants she had been used to in India were [...] obsequious and servile and did not presume to talk to their masters as if they were their equals. They made salaams and called them "protector of the poor" and names of that sort. Indian servants were commanded to do things, not asked. It was not the custom to say "please" and "thank you" and Mary had always slapped her Ayah in the face when she was angry. (25)

English servants, Mary quickly discovers, are quite different; most importantly, they are white and, therefore, racially equal to Mary. Though tyrannical and rajah-like herself in India, Mary is much more calm and actually quite timid in England, for she is afraid of how these white servants will react. Martha, in particular, is an enigma to Mary, for the maid does not 'salaam' to Mary, pays no attention to the girl's haughty, superior attitude, and speaks familiarly to her as if Mary were one of her own sisters. In fact, Mary is rather intimidated by Martha's boldness and "wondered a little what this girl [Martha] would do if one slapped her in the face. She was a round, rosy, good-natured-looking creature, but she had a sturdy way which made Mistress Mary wonder if she might not even slap back--if the person who slapped her was only a little girl" (25). It is

not long before Mary comes to appreciate Martha and actually to thank her for her service and kindness, things which Mary would never have done in India to the native servants. Yet Martha is only on such familiar terms with Mary; when waiting on Colin, Martha is quite timid and deferential because he is the undoubtedly English male (albeit feminized by his illness), whereas Mary's social status is damaged by her Indian Otherness and by her gender, despite the fact that Mary and Colin are of equal class standing.

Further In-validation

At the end of Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Mary is in perhaps an even more awkward social position than she was when she first arrived in England. Though she is no longer 'ill,' she is still socially in-valid on account of her gender and her lack of knowledge and experience in running a household. As discussed earlier, Mary's mother played no part in her daughter's upbringing, and instead left the girl in the care of native Ayahs. The result of this non-interaction with her mother is that Mary has had no upper-middle class female role model to provide an example of the revered 'Angel of the House'; with no 'grand Missus' or even a governess to guide her education, Mary never has an opportunity to learn about the duties and responsibilities she is expected to perform as a 'Memsahib.' Instead, Mary is more familiar with the lower classes, both Indian and English, and thus does not know how to organize a household. In fact, she does not really even have a household of her own to organize, because Misselthwaite Manor is not hers, but Colin's and his father's. Additionally, Mary is virtually absent in the last chapter of the novel when Colin is reunited with, and revalidated by, his father,

reminiscent of when she was forgotten by everyone in India during the cholera outbreak. As Lois Keith notes, “At this point in the story [...] Burnett seems to lose interest in her heroine” (126), and readers do, as well, because, unlike Colin, Mary does not experience a re-validation of her authority or social status. She was already ‘healed’ when she finally met her uncle in the middle of the novel, so he has no reason to feel that she has re-validated herself upon his return at the end. And Mary’s authority over the servants at Misselthwaite had never been established in the first place, as Mr. Craven had placed her under the care of the housekeeper, not vice versa, so her power is not re-validated, either. If anything, Mary has experienced a gradual in-validation throughout the novel, spiraling downward from an authoritative, socially-superior little girl in India into a powerless young woman in England, marginalized by her intimate friendship with her inferiors and by her inability to fulfill the role expected of her as an upper-middle class female. Jane Wood states, “The linking of women’s well-being to contented domesticity was a concept which held considerable sway at the time” (8-9), but this cannot be the case for Mary because she knows nothing of domesticity. She has thus become the epitome of Price-Herndl’s socially in-valid woman.

Klara Sesemann in *Heidi*

“Fresh air impoverishes the doctor.” - Danish Proverb

As with Colin Craven, the details of Klara’s disability are ambiguous, at best; we are told that she is “an only daughter who is obliged to sit all the time in a wheel chair, because she is lame and not well in other ways” (Spyri 63). Additionally, for

reasons unbeknownst to readers, “In the afternoon Klara always had to rest a long time” (86). Yet no specific mention is made of what really ails Klara - after all, she is not feverish, hypochondriacal or prone to hysterics or nervousness. And, in addition to Klara’s non-hysterical nature, the girl rarely sees a doctor, requires no live-in nurse (though the housekeeper tends to her when necessary), and never receives any real medical treatment other than an occasional spoonful of cod-liver oil for yawning during lessons or a trip to a health spa in preparation for her visit to Heidi’s cottage: “I have to take the cure in Ragatz for about six weeks” (252). Regardless of her lack of symptoms, however, Fräulein Rottenmeier worries constantly about her, and believes that every little fluctuation in Klara’s daily routine is dangerous to the girl’s health; for example, when a ghost is believed to be haunting the household, the housekeeper writes immediately to Klara’s father with her concerns about his daughter:

[T]he mysterious proceedings which were repeated every night in his house had so affected his daughter’s delicate health that the most serious results were to be expected. Examples were known of sudden epileptic seizures, or attacks of St. Vitus’s dance, in similar cases, and his daughter was liable to any such misfortune if the house were not relieved from this state of terror. (142)

The housekeeper’s concerns are quite unfounded, however, for Klara remains fairly calm and level-headed throughout the incident.¹ It is difficult to believe, then, that “her doctor has very little hope of her final recovery” (Keith 108), for there seems to be nothing from which she needs to finally recover. But, despite her lack of any real symptoms, she, like other Victorian women, is told by both her doctors and by society that she is sick; after all, “women were sick because they were women” (Thomas 105).

It appears that Klara, then, like Colin, is a victim of “the damaging effects of the kind of iatrogenic medical care that kept a healthy child an invalid” (Messenger-Davies 513). But, as Keith explains, the ambiguity of Klara’s diseases is an important part of her ‘miracle cure’: “the vagueness of the unspecified illness allows the possibility that it is ‘in the mind’ and can therefore be reversed” (108).

Invalid-ation

Like Colin and Mary, Klara, too, has difficulty asserting any authority over her servants, not only on account of her disability, but also because of her gender. Socially, it does not matter that she is the child of a wealthy, respectable gentleman; the fact is, she is a female child who, by the very nature of her gender, is pushed into the periphery of the male-dominated society. This marginality is only increased by her illnesses and disability: “Whereas women in general are characterized as weak and lacking power, better off staying at home, the invalid is specifically recognized as even weaker and more powerless than most women and is required to stay at home” (Price-Herndl 2). Klara’s infirmity, then, limits her ability to assume the conventional feminine role as overseer of the household, a task which is difficult to perform while she is confined to bed or to a wheelchair. Therefore, as Price-Herndl explains, disabled girls like Klara are socially invalid-ated by their diseases: “‘Invalid’ further carries traces of its etymology and suggests the not-valid. Invalidism is therefore the term that best describes the cultural definition of women in the nineteenth century (and perhaps in the twentieth) and the ill woman’s relation to power and her culture” (1). Moreover, as Keith explains, Klara’s disability and accompanying dependence prevent her from

being treated like an adult or from ever leaving the nursery, despite the fact that she is a teenager: “Although described as a child or a ‘little daughter,’ she is actually about 14 years old, the crucial transitional age between being a girl and being a woman. But in her invalid state she is forever the child [...]. She will not be on the path to young womanhood until she is made whole by walking” (112).

Accordingly, Klara is forced to acquiesce to Fräulein Rottenmeier’s commands, despite the girl’s social superiority over the housekeeper. Ignoring Herr Sesemann’s orders that Klara is to be obeyed, the housekeeper resists the invalid and questions her decisions, and is only able to do so because Klara is disabled: “Her illness makes her passive and excludes her from the possibility of rebellion and misrule” (97), and from controlling her servants. The young girl tries to remain firm, but is eventually forced to call on her father to have her own way: “No, no, Fräulein Rottenmeier, you must wait until papa is here; he has already written that he is coming soon, and I will tell him everything; then he will say what is to be done with Heidi” (Spyri 102). We are then told that “Fräulein Rottenmeier dared make no objection to this” (102), not because of Klara’s authority (or rather, her feeble attempt at control) but because of Herr Sesemann’s masculine supremacy. As a female and an invalid, then, the only authority Klara really has is the ability to ask her father to support her, but this ‘power’ is, in itself, a form of weakness, based on her gender and disabilities, for she must appeal to him, the masculine head of the household, to validate her power in person over the servants.

Thus, as in the Craven household, the Sesemanns’ employees enjoy more liberty and self-determination than that to which they were conventionally entitled, on account

of Herr Sesemann's frequent absences for business and the lack of a 'grand Missus' to keep things in order. As head servant, Fräulein Rottenmeier, in particular, enjoys the most freedom, for she, "since the death of Klara's mother many years before, had been in charge of everything in the Sesemann household. Herr Sesemann was away most of the time and left the whole house in Fräulein Rottenmeier's care" (71). Much like Mrs. Medlock, she rules the house with an 'iron fist,' keeping everything and everyone in order. Her authority is further validated by the respect Herr Sesemann shows her on the rare occasions when he is home, for the master always refers to her respectfully as 'Fraulein Rottenmeier,' instead of simply 'Rottenmeier.' Accustomed to such deference, the housekeeper is, naturally, annoyed that Frau Sesemann, the master's mother, insists on treating her in a more conventional manner: "Fräulein Rottenmeier was very much troubled because the old lady continually addressed her by her last name alone; but there was nothing to be done about it; the grandmamma always had her own way, and there was no help for it" (120-1). Accordingly, Fräulein Rottenmeier is less than enthusiastic when the master's mother comes to visit, and is determined to retain as much of her authority as possible: "Fräulein Rottenmeier, very erect, went through the rooms inspecting everything, as if to show that even though a second ruling power was near at hand, her own, for all that, had not come to an end" (119). Moreover, the housekeeper does even not think of herself as one of the servants, always referring to them as something separate from, and inferior to, herself: "She strode up and down the room, considering how the servants should address Adelheid. Herr Sesemann had written that she must be treated as his daughter; and this command had to be carried out, especially in regard to the servants, thought Fräulein Rottenmeier" (84-5). In addition,

unlike Mrs. Medlock, who must refer to the Craven boy as 'Master Colin,' Fräulein Rottenmeier is allowed to call Klara simply by her name, rather than 'Fräulein Klara,' as the rest of the servants do. Fräulein Rottenmeier thus refuses to acknowledge her own status as a servant, preferring instead to revel in the power and control she has been allowed on account of Herr Sesemann's frequent absences and Klara's limited ability to fulfill the role traditionally assigned to upper-middle-class females as supervisor of the household.

The result of all of this is that Fräulein Rottenmeier and the rest of the staff are able to be impertinent and even disobedient in the Sesemann household. This is especially evident in their interactions with Heidi, for all of the servants treat her disrespectfully, despite the fact that "Herr Sesemann had written that she must be treated as his daughter" (84). Virtually ignoring this command, the butler, Sebastian, growls menacingly at Heidi (77), and Tinette, the maid, continually treats the girl with contempt and disdain, and "never talked with the ignorant Heidi, for she considered her beneath her notice" (155). The maid is so impertinent, in fact, that Heidi even starts evading her: "she never dreamed of speaking to Tinette, whom she always avoided, for Tinette spoke to her in a scornful tone and was continually laughing at her, and Heidi understood her perfectly" (104). As acting (and assumed) head of the household, Fräulein Rottenmeier should have punished Tinette and Sebastian for disregarding the master's orders but, instead, the housekeeper acts in a similar manner herself, criticizing everything Heidi says and does, but "the child did not think this anything strange, as she felt continually under her [Fräulein Rottenmeier] disapproval" (117). The housekeeper once calls her a barbarian (102), and frequently refers to Heidi as 'the creature,'

symbolizing both her contempt for the child's name (which was unknown in Germany) and her belief that the girl is socially inferior and thus does not belong in the respectable Sesemann household, despite the total acceptance the Sesemanns show for Heidi. Moreover, though Herr Sesemann insisted that "he would have no children tormented in his house" (83-4), Fräulein Rottenmeier routinely prevents Heidi from expressing her home-sickness, and even threatens to lock her in the cellar for disrupting Klara's lessons. The lack of an authoritative master or mistress of the house, therefore, prevents the maintenance of conventional class relations in the Sesemann household, a situation which the servants clearly enjoy.

Conventional social relations are also disrupted by Klara's illness, for it prevents her from forming relationships with her social equals. If she were a healthy young woman, she would attend school, where she would have companions of a similar social status, but, as an invalid, she is rarely able to leave the house (apart from receiving medical treatment). We learn that Klara "never goes out; she is not able to go out" (98), and that "she is almost always alone and obliged to study alone with a teacher, which is very dull for her" (63). She thus lives a monotonous life, confined to home, and, as a result, Klara, understandably, becomes as lonely and socially isolated as Mary and Colin, despite the fact that Klara lives in the heart of Frankfurt, not in a remote part of the country. The girl never has company, apart from occasional visits by her grandmother, and her beloved father is often away on business, so Klara's social interaction is thus limited to only the household servants, her doctor, and her tutor. And none of the servants have children of their own, so Klara is surrounded on a daily basis by socially inferior adults, none of whom is an appropriate companion for her. Her life,

then, appears to be as in-valid as she is.

To stop Klara from feeling lonely in her isolation, Herr Sesemann agrees to let his daughter have a live-in playmate to provide some excitement in the invalid's monotonous life. Heidi is chosen, and the Sesemanns eagerly and immediately welcome the poor Swiss peasant into their home and into their family as an equal, thereby breaking with the conventional social customs of the time, for the Sesemanns are very wealthy and well-respected. Though absent when the girl first arrives, "Herr Sesemann had written that she must be treated as his daughter," (84) and "treated in every way as Klara's equal" (83), not simply as a guest, and certainly not as a servant or social inferior, despite the fact that Heidi is a poor, illiterate child from the mountains. She is, therefore, given her own bedroom in the Sesemann house and is allowed to take lessons with Klara's private tutor; the under-servants are also ordered to refer to her, respectfully, as "Mamselle" (87). In fact, this title is more respectful than Klara's, whom the servants refer to, fairly familiarly, as "Fräulein Klara." The master's mother, a highly respected woman, encourages this courteous behaviour towards Heidi, and she herself forbids the child from calling her "Gracious Lady," as Fräulein Rottenmeier had instructed; instead, Frau Sesemann kindly tells Heidi, "In the nursery I am grandmamma, and you shall call me so," (120), thereby equating Heidi with her real granddaughter. Klara, too, treats Heidi like a sister, giving her many expensive presents and indulging her every whim, much like Herr Sesemann with his daughter. She even goes one step further in her friendship with Heidi than Mary does with Dickon and Martha, for Klara allows Heidi to call her simply by her name, rather than 'Fräulein Klara.' Such total equality between Heidi and the Sesemanns breaks down the

conventional social barriers between the upper-middle class and the lower classes, but it is socially permitted because of Klara's invalidism and the fact that she is female and, therefore, does not have the same social responsibilities as her male counterparts.

Re-Valid-ation

As with Colin Craven, Klara's disability entails a lack of authority and inability to create a conventional relationship with her servants; unlike her male counterpart, however, Klara's illness does not mean that she is treated with disrespect by her staff or marginalized in society. In fact, the opposite is true for Klara: her social respectability is only heightened by her infirmity. Illness was, after all, considered to be a natural state for affluent women in the nineteenth century. Society actually expected females to be ill, in what Samuel Thomas calls the "Victorian woman's 'catch 22' predicament: she will be ill because she is a woman" (107). As Price-Herndl notes, "many women's illnesses of the late nineteenth century [...] have been 'fashionable diseases,' that is, culturally accepted, expected, and even [...] induced" (22). Accordingly, a middle-class woman's social position was not jeopardized by her illness (though she was already marginalized on account of her gender), because this was something which society expected, and even dictated. Thus, since Klara belongs to the wealthy Sesemann family, who "live[s] in almost the finest house in all Frankfurt" (Spryi 63), the young lady remains as socially respectable as her healthy relatives, if not more so, for adhering to society's expectations. And though her authority over the household servants is undermined by her disability, the staff still treat her with respect, referring to her, deferentially, as "Fräulein Klara," signifying her position as their social superior.

The Sesemann's butler, Sebastian, even strives to uphold her status by chastising a young street vendor for using Klara's first name familiarly: "You dirty street urchin, you! can't you say 'Fräulein Klara,' as the rest of us do?" (98) Because of her gender, then, Klara's status is not negatively affected by the fact that she is confined to a wheelchair; rather, her position is preserved by her illness, for it demonstrates her compliance (willing or not) with society's expectations of her as a female.

Because she is 'suffering' from ambiguous diseases, Klara is not required to be confined to bed, as Colin Craven is. In fact, she refuses such treatment, preferring instead to recline "in her comfortable wheel chair. She spent the whole day in it and was pushed from one room to another" (70). It is important to note that, unlike Colin, Klara wants to be as mobile as possible; while it is debatable whether or not her wheelchair actually is comfortable, the mobility it allows her not only provides her with a sense of freedom (albeit limited to the confines of her home) and control over her 'disease,' but it also gives her complete access to her house, thereby allowing her to keep informed of the daily activities within all areas of her household. Whereas most of the servants at Misselthwaite Manor never saw Colin because of his self-confinement to his room, all of the Sesemann employees are familiar with Klara and interact with her on a daily basis. Though unable to exert any real authority of her own over the servants, Klara's regular interactions with them earn her their respect, and is an important step to fulfilling the role expected by society of a nineteenth-century female: "the Victorian ideal for womanhood [...] required her to be domestically active, vibrant, [...] in charge of the hearth and home" (Keith 116). She is, therefore, able to observe, if not yet supervise, her servants in their daily activities; this even extends to Heidi in her

grandfather's cottage: "Klara always found this busy cleaning in every corner of the hut so interesting that she was very glad to watch Heidi at work" (Spyri 297). As Keith expounds, "14-year old Clara [sic] is now well on the way to leaving behind the dependence of childhood and becoming the 'Heart of the House' in Frankfurt" (117). The only thing preventing Klara from assuming command and exerting her full authority in the domestic sphere, then, is her 'illness,' for she has already earned the respect and learned the skills of observation required to run a household of servants.

Heal Thyself?

In the end, Klara's 'miracle cure,' like Colin's, does not come from expensive medicines or therapies; rather, it is the result of friendly interactions with social inferiors and the breaking of conventional social boundaries. Before visiting Heidi up in the Alps, Klara seems doomed to remain confined to her wheelchair forever, yet it takes just a few short weeks in the mountain cottage with Heidi and her grandfather for Klara to experience a 'miracle cure' and start to walk on her own. But, unlike Colin, Klara does not instigate her own 'cure'; she passively accepts it as it is actively pressed upon her by males. It is the kind, yet aggressive, ministrations and encouragement of Heidi's poor, uneducated grandfather which enable Klara to walk, rather than the expensive medicines and therapies prescribed by her well-educated German doctor. The grandfather is the only person who does not subscribe to her 'illnesses' at all; much like Colin and Mary with their secret garden, the grandfather believes that the fresh air of the Alps will heal all infirmities, including Klara's ambiguous diseases, and he forces her to try walking a little bit every day:

“Will the little daughter not try just once to stand on the ground a moment?”

Klara had tried to do as he wished, but had always said immediately, “Oh, it hurts me so!” and had clung fast to him, but each day he had let her try a little longer. (Spyri 277)

Heidi’s friend Peter unintentionally provides the final ‘encouragement’ for Klara after he maliciously destroys her wheelchair; Klara now has no choice but to stand up and walk on her own. When she finds it much easier than she expected and realizes that she has been ‘healed,’ she delightfully exclaims, “I am well! I am well! I do not need to sit in a wheel chair any longer; I can go about by myself like other people!” (295). The ‘miracle cure’ is so unexpected by her father and grandmother that they do not even recognize her when next they see her: the grandmother asks, “Klärchen, is it you or is it not? [...] Child! I don’t know you any longer!” (298). And when Herr Sesemann arrives soon after, Klara is forced to ask him, “Papa, don’t you know me any longer? [...] Am I so changed?” (304). Indeed, she is changed, and is no longer the infirm ‘little daughter’ of the beginning of the novel, but is, rather, a healthy young woman, who is ready to “become her own master and [...] help someone else and not always be obliged to take help from others” (285). This experience of complete freedom, though, is only possible for these few moments, up in the Alps, away from society and its expectations of middle-class females; now that she is “healed,” Klara must return to Frankfurt and take up her role as the “Woman of the House,” a marginal position at best, yet she will be, nevertheless, far less in-valid now that she can walk than she was when she was ill.

But this ‘miracle cure’ is not so much of an establishment of validity as Colin’s

'cure' was for him, but rather, a re-validation or further validation, for her social status was never really threatened by her 'illnesses.' Though marginalized by her close friendship with Heidi and by her gender in the male-dominated nineteenth century, Klara always was respected as the daughter of an affluent gentleman, and dutifully performed her role as the 'Angel of the House' as best she could while confined to her wheelchair. Her role in society does not change now that she is no longer disabled; as a woman, she is expected to confine herself to the domestic sphere, to supervise and organize her home, family, and servants. As Jane Wood notes, "The linking of women's well-being to contented domesticity was a concept which held considerable sway at the time" (8-9). After all, "this saintly creature was always where she should be; in the home, providing comfort and solace to others. [...] As a middle-class girl, [...] she could effectively manage the house from above, giving guidance to the staff, checking that the housekeeping books were in order, ordering the meals" (Keith 82). And though she now will have more power over her employees, the fact remains that, as a woman, Klara will still need to appeal to her father and, later, her husband, to endorse and enforce this authority. Despite her 'cure,' then, Klara, like Mary Lennox, is destined to remain an in-valid in society: 'Invalidism is therefore the term that best describes the cultural definition of women in the nineteenth century [...] and the ill woman's relation to power and her culture' (Price-Herndl 1).

Notes

¹ If anything, Fräulein Rottenmeier appears to be the one suffering from hysteria and nervousness, for this and other episodes in the novel visibly upset her, whereas Klara is relaxed and actually enjoys the situations because they provide a welcome change in her lonely, isolated, monotonous life.

3

“And I, poor puny wretch!”

- Phineas Fletcher in *John Halifax, Gentleman*

“There is something in sickness, that breaks down the pride of manhood; that softens the heart, and brings it back to the feelings of infancy.”

- Washington Irving, “The Widow And Her Son” (1820)

Like Colin Craven’s status in *The Secret Garden*, Phineas Fletcher’s social position is threatened by his illness in Dinah Mulock Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Like Burnett’s protagonist, Phineas is isolated from society by his illness, and is thereby prevented from making any friends or from attending a boarding school like other boys of his age and rank. Though they see each other everyday, Phineas is also isolated from his father, whose strict disposition often prevents any real communication between the two. Father and son are further isolated by Phineas’s refusal to take over the family business, as Abel desperately desires. Additionally, illness marginalizes the boy because of its feminizing effects; like Colin, Phineas is weak and helpless, and is, therefore, required to stay at home in the feminine sphere rather than joining the masculine work world. But, unlike Colin, who actively attempts to assert his masculinity, Phineas resigns himself to the fact that even his very personality is effeminate, and he is content to remain this way for the rest of his life. Moreover, despite the fact that Phineas is older than Colin, Klara, and Mary, he is, nevertheless, younger than they are in many ways, on account of his persistent illnesses and his perpetual effeminacy. This causes his father to infantilize him and treat him as a child, ignoring the fact that Phineas, at sixteen years of age, is actually nearing adulthood. Phineas is further invalidated by his inability to establish conventional class relations

with his housekeeper, who is dominant over the invalid, despite his social superiority. Finally, though Phineas recovers to the point where he no longer needs his wheelchair, he does not experience a 'miracle cure,' so he is never revalidated or 'remanned' in society. Thus, rather than becoming James Adams's athletic masculine gentleman, Phineas Fletcher instead remains the epitome of Diane Price-Herndl's "unmanned" man.

Initially, Phineas appears to be healthier than Colin Craven and Klara Sesemann, for, though he rides in a wheelchair, he is able to walk, albeit very unsteadily, and uses crutches around the house to improve his stability. Whereas Colin is thoroughly embarrassed at being seen in his wheelchair in public, Phineas actually prefers riding in his carriage to using the crutches: "I had not grown used to them, and felt often ashamed" (Craik 20). Nevertheless, his physician is optimistic that Phineas can learn to walk entirely on his own, and Abel Fletcher is even convinced that his son could make a full recovery from all of his illnesses: "he always had the belief that people need not be ill unless they chose, and that I could do a great deal if I would" (40). Thus, it is no miracle that Phineas is eventually able to walk on his own, though he does suffer a sort of regression in later life, for he resorts to using a cane. And, in addition to this handicap, Phineas also suffers from a variety of diseases, though readers are never made aware of any details concerning these ailments. We do learn that he had smallpox as a child (275), but that is the only specific disease ever mentioned. The only other references that Phineas makes to his illnesses are brief and vague: "ill-health seemed to have doubled and trebled my sixteen years into a mournful maturity" (15) and "[I had] seasons of excessive pain" (27). For both Colin and Klara, the lack of details of their

diseases is an important part of their 'miracle cures': "the vagueness of the unspecified illness allows the possibility that it is 'in the mind' and can therefore be reversed" (Keith 108). For Phineas, however, the vagueness of his infirmities do nothing except reflect his own ambiguous position and function in society.

Isolation And Infantilization

As with the children previously discussed, Phineas is isolated and lonely because of his sickness. The boy lives in the heart of Norton Bury, a bustling village, but his illness often confines him to home, thereby preventing him from attending school or starting a career. And, like Colin, Mary, and Klara, Phineas is an only child, so his social interaction is limited to his father and servants, his social inferiors, who themselves are too busy performing their duties to spend much time with him. As he himself notes after one particularly difficult season, "I never stirred from my room, and never saw anybody but my father, Dr. Jessop, and Jael" (Craik 40). Thus, like Klara, Phineas is as isolated in his urban house as Colin and Mary are in their remote mansion on the moors. Naturally, Phineas does not enjoy being confined to home and tries to remain mobile in order to break from his isolation, and tells the readers, "My father had got me a sort of carriage, in which, with a little external aid, I could propel myself, so as to be his companion occasionally in his walks" (10). Despite this (limited) mobility, though, the boy is friendless, and often comments in his narrative on his isolation, describing his "sad, lonely life" (15) and his "long introverted life, which, colourless itself, had nothing to do but to reflect and retain clear images of the lives around it" (27). It is only after gaining his first friend that Phineas is able to realize just how

lonely and isolated he had previously been, and he desperately contrives to keep John Halifax nearby to break from his otherwise unhappy, mundane, and solitary life. As he himself admits,

I had been revolving many plans, which had one sole aim and object, to keep near me this lad, whose companionship and help seemed to me, brotherless, sisterless, and friendless as I was, the very thing that would give me an interest in life, or, at least, make it drag on less wearily. To say that what I projected was done out of charity or pity would not be true; it was simple selfishness. (17)

In fact, Phineas is so desperate for his friend's companionship that he actually accompanies his father to work, where John is employed, despite the fact that the invalid had always "held the tanyard in abhorrence" (32) and usually avoided it as much as possible. But Phineas also abhors his isolation and is willing to brave his disgust for a chance at true companionship.

Yet this is not the only type of isolation which Phineas experiences because of his illness; he is also isolated from his parent, despite the fact that, unlike the other fathers discussed in this thesis, Abel Fletcher is constantly present in his son's life. Though Abel often appears emotionally distant and even dispassionate towards his son, he is not malicious; rather, he has a strict, austere disposition, which nevertheless makes it difficult for Phineas to connect with his father. Also, as previously stated, the boy's illnesses require him to be confined to home which, in turn, prevents him from becoming the masculine, athletic boy that was so praised by Victorian society and so desired by his father. As Phineas himself often acknowledges, "It was very hard for Abel Fletcher to have for his only child such a sickly creature as I" (10). The boy's

confinement to home likewise prevents him from spending much time with his father, who is at work during the day, but even when he is home in the evenings, Abel's quiet, reflective personality does not allow for much conversation between the two. It is only rarely that Abel engages in discussion, as when he expresses his joy at Phineas's recovery from one of his illnesses: "He gave token of this [his joy] by being remarkably conversible [sic] over our meal - though, as usual, his conversation had a sternly moral tone" (31). Yet even this it is not a friendly conversation but, rather, a didactic speech from father to son. But the factor most detrimental to their relationship is that the boy is physically unable and emphatically unwilling to inherit the family business, as Abel hoped and expected: "That I [Phineas] should ever be what was my poor father's one desire, his assistant and successor in his business was, I knew, a thing totally impossible" (32). Eventually, Abel comes to realize this, as Phineas describes: "he set aside for ever his last lingering hope of having a son able to assist, and finally succeed him in his business, and [...] I [Phineas] set aside every dream of growing up to be a help and comfort to my father. It cost something on both our parts" (55). Despite their daily contact with each other, then, a typical father-son relationship does not exist between the Fletchers, because Phineas's illness prevents him from becoming the son that Abel always wanted.

The result of this isolation and distance from his son is that Abel does not know how to interact with Phineas. Because the boy is disabled and often ill, he requires a significant amount of care and supervision, just like an infant; as a result, the elder Fletcher treats Phineas like a child, despite the fact that his son is sixteen at the beginning of the novel, and thus nearing adulthood. This infantilization is made evident

on the rare occasions when they do have an actual conversation with each other, for Abel dominates the discussion with didacticism. As Phineas notes, “[Abel’s conversation was] adapted to the improvement of what he persisted in considering my ‘infant’ mind” (31). Abel thus ignores or is ignorant of the fact that his son was actually quite well read, as reading was almost the sole entertainment available to the invalid. And this persistence of regarding Phineas as a child further infantilizes the sixteen-year-old, for the boy can never mature to Abel’s satisfaction without experiencing a miracle cure and complete reversal of his effete personality. In addition, Abel continually worries about Phineas and tries to prevent his son from ever gaining any independence, lest he should get into trouble; as Phineas notes, “he never trusted me anywhere alone,” (10) even in the small, peaceful village. Phineas’s wheelchair, then, comes to have another significance, for not only is it a visual indicator of his disability, but it also represents a sort of baby carriage which his father can push along during his walks, keeping the boy under his supervision and perpetuating his infantilization. Abel thus forces Phineas’s life to fit into his own agenda, so that the father may keep his son under close surveillance. But Phineas never once complains about such treatment; rather than rebelling against, or even being ashamed of this infantilization, Phineas instead allows it to continue. Moreover, he actually perpetuates it himself by never trying to exert his own independence or assert his maturity. He even readily admits that “at sixteen, [he is] as helpless and useless to him [Abel] as a baby” (10). Ironically, this infantilization actually works to Phineas’s advantage in a way, for he is not forced into running his father’s tanyard, a business which he despises; on the other hand, however, it also means that Phineas is doomed to remain a in-valid infant to his father, as well as

to society.

Abel is not the only one, though, who infantilizes Phineas; John Halifax also makes Phineas feel like a child, despite the fact that John is actually two years his junior. Unlike Abel Fletcher, though, John's infantilization of Phineas is initially unintentional, for it is the result of the pity which the title character feels for his friend. This infantilization begins as soon as John and Phineas meet, and lasts until the end of the novel with John's death. When they first meet, John immediately pities the invalid and his situation, and offers to carry Phineas inside his home: "He [John] put his arm round mine, helped me in, as if he had been a big elder brother and I a little ailing child" (29). Though Phineas notices this kind, yet infantilizing, manner with which John moves him, he does not realize that he actually is a little ailing child, at least as far as John is concerned. As their friendship continues to grow, so do Phineas's child-like feelings, which are unconsciously encouraged by John's kindness: "We were both very merry; and though I was his senior I seemed with him, out of my great weakness and infirmity, to feel almost like a child" (20). As the novel progresses and the characters age, Phineas finally begins to realize his infantilization, and notices that John, though two years younger, is much more mature than his elder: "I woke to the consciousness that I was twenty years old, and that John Halifax was - a man; the difference between us being precisely as I have expressed it" (52). The invalid thus resigns himself to the fact that he will always be unintentionally infantilized by John, because his friend is much more mature than Phineas can ever be, on account of his illnesses and disability.

Effeminacy And Feminization Of Illness

Similar to Colin Craven, Phineas Fletcher is further marginalized in society by the feminizing effects of his illness. Physically, his infirmities leave him feeble, pale and altogether unathletic, only able to maneuver his wheelchair with “a little external aid” (10). He himself notes, “[I have a] poor, quavering voice” (26) and reveals, “from my birth I had been puny and diseased” (34), rather than muscular and athletic. Also, he is too ill either to attend the ‘masculine’ boarding school described by James Adams or to enter the male-dominated workforce; instead, Phineas is confined to home, which is conventionally the feminine domain. Though writing about Victorian middle-class society in general, Adams’s discussion certainly applies to Phineas, whose father leaves every morning to go to work (the masculine arena), while the boy remains behind at home in the feminine realm; Adams points out, “The separation of home and workplace, and the increasingly rigorous gendering of that division, led to a growing isolation of middle-class fathers from their sons, who in their early years were immersed in a sphere increasingly designated ‘feminine’” (5). And, unlike other young boys, Phineas is never able to escape from this feminine sphere, on account of his infirmity, and so remains in the domestic arena even into adulthood. Phineas’s confinement to a wheelchair also adds to his feminization for, as Adams notes, many Victorian social observers closely associate physical form with the concept of a gentleman: “[they] increasingly represent the gentleman as an organic ideal, rooted above all in an innate, physiological sensibility. The gentleman’s status thus derives from, and is made visible in, his body” (152). Since he requires a wheelchair, Phineas cannot possibly be considered a true gentleman, or even a man at all, in the Victorian

culture. Moreover, Phineas is further feminized in society simply because he is prone to illness; as Jane Wood asserts: “representations of male nervousness [...] fashioned an image of an invalid feminized by the very nature of his disease” (Wood 60). As Wood further notes, male invalids were regarded by nineteenth-century society as freakish oddities, a stark contrast to the muscular gentleman-athletes idealized by the Victorians: “The perception of the male nervous sufferer was one of a social, sexual, and psychological anomaly in a culture of robust and resolute manliness” (60). Phineas Fletcher is the epitome of such social aberration and, since he never experiences a ‘miracle cure,’ he can never escape this stigma, and so remains effeminate for the rest of his life.

But Phineas is also feminized by his very personality; he himself admits, “my character was too feeble and womanish” (Craik 53). Elaine Showalter notes that this is not an uncommon trait in Dinah Craik’s characters: “Craik [...] usually made the crippled character male, but the behavior [sic] and emotion of her invalids are always feminine” (17). Phineas Fletcher fits this description perfectly: “Critics immediately declared that Phineas (like some of Charlotte Brontë’s heroes) was a woman in disguise. [...] Phineas - crippled, gentle, domestic - clearly had the attributes of one kind of Victorian woman” (17). This ‘womanish’ personality is demonstrated when Phineas refuses to take over his father’s tanyard, not only because he is effeminately nauseated by the actual gruesome process of tanning, but also because it is part of the male work arena, and he is, as stated earlier, more comfortable in, and familiar with, the feminine domestic sphere; he himself notes, “how I disliked the tanyard and all belonging to it” (Craik 25). As one critic points out, “These traits might well be admirable in a woman;

the man who has them is crippled” (Mitchell 48). Moreover, Phineas never marries and, instead, becomes something like a spinster, living with John and Ursula, totally dependent on them, rather than living alone as an independent bachelor. Phineas’s situation is further problematized by his status within the Halifax household; as one critic notes, “when he professes to be an uncle, the reader is aware constantly that he is really an aunt [...]” (qtd. in Showalter 17). Thus, as Diane Price-Herndl explains, “the invalid is described as, if not feminine, certainly not masculine; he is unmanned” (181). Phineas’s liminal position, a cross between a male and a female, similarly conforms to Sally Mitchell’s characterization of the “invalid narrator” as one who “bridges the separate spheres of woman and man; he has a feminine viewpoint yet he can share a man’s life and thoughts” (49). Even more than Colin Craven, then, does Phineas exhibit distinctly feminine qualities and behaviour, which serve to further marginalize and invalid-ate him in society.

In spite of, and even because of, his effeminacy, however, Phineas greatly admires masculinity and athleticism, especially as personified in John Halifax, whom the invalid comes to idealize and idolize. As Phineas himself admits, “there, with all his hardships, he stood before me, the model of healthy boyhood. Alas! I envied him” (Craik 37). Later, when John is offered a position at Abel’s tanyard, Phineas is again impressed by his friend’s masculinity: “he threw his battered cap high up in the air, and shouted out, ‘Hurrah!’ - a thorough boy” (26). The invalid also joins in the celebration, but not nearly as effectively: “And I, in my poor, quavering voice, shouted too” (26). John, then, is Phineas’s complete opposite, for he is as masculine as the invalid is effeminate, and Phineas is simultaneously jealous and admiring of his friend’s

manliness: “What would I not have given to have been so stalwart and so tall! [...] [I]n person the lad was tall and strongly built; and I, poor puny wretch! so revered physical strength. Everything in him seemed to indicate that which I had not: his muscular limbs, his square, broad shoulders, his healthy cheek” (9-10). Elaine Showalter notes, “male sexuality is symbolically represented through the energy with which Halifax fights floods, fires, and rioters” (18), and presents a stark contrast to the passive, effete personality of the novel’s narrator. Phineas cannot help but admire John, and carefully describes all aspects of his friend’s physical appearance, admiring even the most minute details:

Brown eyes, deep sunken, with strongly-marked brows, a nose like most other Saxon noses, nothing particular; lips well shaped, lying one upon the other, firm and close; a square, sharply-outlined, resolute chin, of that type which gives character and determination to the whole physiognomy, and without which in the fairest features, as in the best dispositions, one is always conscious of a certain want. (Craik 9)

According to Sally Mitchell, “Phineas Fletcher’s primary function [...] is to admire John Halifax. He unabashedly loves his friend; he can dwell on John’s character, praise his strengths, and approve of his actions” (49). And, as R. H. Hutton accurately notes, Phineas’s idolization and admiration of John are rather problematic, because they border on a sort of homosexual love for his friend: “During the early part of the tale, [...] it is difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Finn [sic] will fall hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard it is to remember that Phineas is of the male sex” (qtd. in Showalter 17). In the decidedly-heterosexual Victorian society, such intimate feelings

only highlight Phineas's effeminacy and further marginalize and invalidate him.

Invalidation

As in *The Secret Garden* and *Heidi*, conventional class relations are also disrupted in *John Halifax, Gentleman* by the actions of the master of the household, Abel Fletcher. Whereas class relations are undermined in the Craven and Sesemann households by both the absence of the upper-middle class master and by the child invalids who are unable to assert authority, the relations in the Fletcher household are disrupted in spite of the master's constant presence. Though he is authoritative, Abel Fletcher is, nevertheless, occasionally lax when it comes to enforcing his power as the master of the house, due to his peaceful Quaker beliefs. As with Mrs. Medlock and Fräulein Rottenmeier, this situation most benefits the head servant, in this case, Jael; in fact, she is actually accorded more privileges than both the Craven and Sesemann housekeepers. Jael is allowed to refer to her employer familiarly by his first name, and is not required to call him 'sir,' or 'master,' or some other title of deference and respect. Though this is a result of Abel Fletcher's Nonconformist belief of equality, it nevertheless demonstrates a disregard for conventional social customs and relations between the middle-class employer and the lower-class employee. Naturally, this is agreeable to Jael who, "though she held nominally the Friends' doctrine - obeyed in the letter at least, 'Call no man your master'" (Craik 29), including her master and employer. The housekeeper is also allowed to eat at the same table as the socially superior Fletchers: "Jael [...] always ate her dinner at the same time and table as ourselves, but 'below the salt'" (31), rather than in the kitchen with the other servants.

Finally, she is even permitted to criticize her master openly when she disagrees with his actions, as when he refuses to sell his flour at a reduced rate during the famine of 1800:

“Dost thee mock me, Abel Fletcher?” cried she angrily. “Preach not to others while the sin lies on thy own head.

“[...] Nor while,” pursued Jael, driven apparently to the last and most poisoned arrow in her quiver of wrath - “while the poor folk be starving in scores about Norton Bury, and the rich folk there will not sell their wheat under famine price. Take heed thyself, Abel Fletcher.”

My father winced, either from a twinge of gout or conscience, and then Jael suddenly ceased the attack, sent the other servants out of the room, and tended her master as carefully as if she had not insulted him. (74)

As proof of the weakening of conventional class relations in the Fletcher home, the housekeeper is not disciplined in any way for this verbal assault upon her superior, despite the fact that it occurred in front of the other servants; Abel Fletcher remains silent and seems to even ignore the servant's outbreak altogether. Indeed, Jael is so intimidating and aggressive that Phineas notes, “even her master was sometimes rather afraid of Jael” (49). Thus, the conventional status quo between employer and employee in the Fletcher household is destabilized by Abel's Nonconformist religion and by his frequent unwillingness to exert his authority over the servants.

The lack of conventional class relations is even more evident in the subservient relationship which the invalid Phineas has with the housekeeper. Because his father is alive and quite active in the boy's life, there is no need for Abel Fletcher to give any power over the servants to Phineas. The boy, then, never even has the opportunity to

attempt to exert any authority of his own over the servants, because his father is always there in person to do it for him. But even if Phineas did have such an opportunity, it would be difficult for him because his social status is undermined by his disease, so the sickly boy has no power whatsoever over Jael, despite the fact that he is the son of a gentleman. This housekeeper was, as Phineas describes, “the only womankind we ever had about us, and who, save to me when I happened to be very ill, certainly gave no indication of her sex in its softness and tenderness” (17). She is aggressive and assertive in nature, and breaks with the conventional customs by actually attempting to prevent Phineas from associating with the socially inferior John Halifax, despite the fact that she, too, is lower-class: “I bean’t going to let you knock yourself up with looking after a beggar boy” (17). Jael comes to have as much control over Phineas as his father does, for she actually succeeds in prohibiting him from doing other things; Phineas notes, “she never once allowed me to take my rare walk under the trees in the Abbey yard; nor, if she could help it, would she even let me sit watching the lazy Avon from the garden wall” (73). Such a relationship between Phineas and his servant is not surprising, however; as James Adams notes, “the [...] invocation of the male body throughout mid-Victorian discourse as a central locus of masculine authority” (151) was common, so any power Phineas has as the son of a gentleman is destroyed by his illnesses and disability, making it easy for Jael to dominate. Indeed, Jael’s supremacy is ever-present in the boy’s life, for the invalid constantly thinks of her when making plans to be with his friend; Phineas often wonders, “What would Jael have said?” (30). Further, Phineas’s illnesses leave him so feeble, both in physical strength and character, that he cannot even resist the commands of the aggressive housekeeper¹: “I was too

weak to combat, and Jael was too strong an adversary" (27). This weakness actually develops into a self-described "mortal fear of Jael" (28), a situation which is doubly unique and troublesome for Phineas, because it shows not only the dominance of a social inferior over her superior, but also the power which the female housekeeper has over the young man, thereby upsetting the conventional social order and roles of the sexes.

Class relations are also destabilized by the fact that the middle-class Phineas befriends the poor, homeless John Halifax, thereby further undermining the narrator's position as the son of a gentleman. This friendship is a surprise to everyone, John in particular; as Phineas recalls:

I [...] said something about wishing we were not 'strangers.'

"Do you?" The lad's half-amazed, half-grateful smile went right to my heart. (14)

Keenly aware of social etiquette, though, John tries to maintain propriety in their relationship by calling Phineas, 'sir,' but the invalid further ignores society's expectations by insisting that his inferior address him, familiarly, by his name: "Don't call me 'sir;' I am only a boy like yourself" (15). John, however, continues to follow decorum, until Phineas once again exhorts, "Don't call me 'sir'; if I say 'John,' why don't you say 'Phineas'?" (33). Though still reluctant, the social inferior finally agrees and, in fact, eventually begins affectionately to call him 'lad.' Phineas is delighted, because it is a sincere acknowledgment of their friendship, and notes, "though he [John] never failed to maintain externally a certain gentle respectfulness of demeanour towards me, yet it was more the natural deference of the younger to the elder, of the strong to the

weak, than the duty paid by a serving-lad to his master's son. And this was how I best liked it to be" (32). Society, however, does not agree; like Fräulein Rottenmeier, the Fletchers' housekeeper, especially, disapproves of Phineas's friendship with John: "all this was highly objectionable to Jael" (19). She continually attempts to prevent Phineas from associating with, and even seeing, his friend, but is usually unsuccessful, for this is the one situation in which Phineas refuses to be passive to his housekeeper. Abel, too, is initially against Phineas's relationship with John, and tells his son flatly, "Pshaw! a lad out o' the tanyard is not fit company for thee. Let him alone; he'll do well enough if thee doesn't try to lift him out of his place" (41). The invalid persists and, in the end, his father finally breaks with social customs and relents, allowing the friendship; as Phineas explains, "after that John Halifax [...] was received in his master's household as our equal and my friend" (51). Though his social status is undermined by a friendship with an inferior, Phineas is unconcerned, for his isolation has finally ended.

Persistent And Perpetual Invalid-ation

Phineas is further marginalized in society in a way that Colin, Mary, and Klara are not, for Phineas's father is a Nonconformist, a Quaker, a religion traditionally persecuted by the dominant Church of England. Jeffrey Cox neatly summarizes the social position of Quakers and other dissenters in the Victorian era: "To most people in England [...], the word Nonconformist means the same thing as it does in the United States: an oddball or [...] dissenter" (243), one who does not adhere to social norms. For the Victorians, then, the Society of Friends is a marginalized religion whose followers are invalidated. As Quakers, the Fletchers frequently experience social

persecution in the novel, even in their mundane, everyday activities, such as walking about town; as Phineas describes, “Many a person looked at us as we passed; almost every body knew us, but few, even of our own neighbours, saluted us; we were Nonconformists and Quakers” (Craik 32). When Phineas’s father was once robbed of a large sum of money, “the law had refused to receive Abel Fletcher’s testimony - he was ‘only a Quaker’” (48). During the Famine of 1800, a mob threatens to burn down the Fletcher house in order to gain access to Abel’s hoard of grain; the crowd grows confident of success for they know that “nobody’ll get hanged for burning out a Quaker!” (86). This point is proven to Phineas by a night-watchman, whom he approaches for help and information:

“And will not one man in the town help him [Abel]; no constables - no law?”

“Oh! he’s a Quaker; the law don’t help Quakers.” That was the truth - the hard, grinding truth - in those days. Liberty, justice, were idle names to Nonconformists of every kind; and all they knew of the glorious constitution of English law was when its iron hand was turned against them. (84)

Technically, however, Phineas is not really a true Quaker: “I had not been brought up in the Society - this having been the last request of my mother, rigidly observed by her husband” (31-2). However, despite his assertion to John that “he [Abel] did not bring me up in the Society, and its restrictions are not binding upon me” (65), Phineas actually is bound to the Nonconformists, since Abel is a member of the Society of Friends; thus, as far as Victorian society is concerned, Phineas is a Quaker, too, by extension. In reality, though, Phineas is actually more of a nonconformist than his father, for the boy is neither truly Quaker nor a member of any other religious sect,

which invalid-ates and marginalizes him even more.

Unlike Colin's glorious reunion with and revalidation by his father at the end of *The Secret Garden*, Phineas instead experiences a further, more complete isolation and invalid-ation from his father, for the boy is replaced by John as Abel's surrogate son and business partner. Though reluctant to abandon hope that Phineas might one day succeed him in business, Abel cannot deny that his son is too sickly and 'womanish' to take over the tanyard. Phineas wants to help his father, though, and he also wants to help John secure a better future for himself, so the invalid suggests a solution to Abel which is satisfying to both father and son: he recommends that his idol, John Halifax, should become Abel's successor at the tanyard. Naturally, Abel is initially unwilling to replace his son with a social inferior, but when John proves his worth by saving the tanyard from a flood, Abel begins to consider Phineas's suggestion seriously; as Phineas observes,

I noticed my father's eyes frequently resting, with keen observance, upon John Halifax. Could it be that there had recurred to him a hint of mine, given faintly that morning, as faintly as if it had only just entered my mind, instead of having for months continually dwelt there, until a fitting moment should arrive? Could it be that this hint, which he had indignantly scouted at the time, was germinating in his acute brain, and might bear fruit in future days? I hoped so - I earnestly prayed so. (55)

The idea does, in fact, germinate in Abel's brain, and he soon takes John on as his successor, and explains his plan: "Then for one year from this time I will take thee as my 'prentice, though thee knowest already nearly as much of the business as I do. At

twenty-one thee wilt be able to set up for thyself, or I may take thee into partnership - we'll see" (94). It is clear, then, that John is not only replacing Phineas in Abel's business, but he is also replacing the invalid as Abel's son, as Abel himself tells John: "remember, thee hast in some measure taken that lad's [Phineas's] place" (94). John Halifax thus becomes Abel Fletcher's surrogate son, the robust, masculine son he had always desired but could never have in Phineas. Though Abel still clearly loves his biological son, Phineas is, nevertheless, effectively replaced by his stalwart friend and this, combined with the other feminizing aspects of his character, makes the invalid more of a daughter to Abel than a son. The "boy's" marginalization and isolation from his father is thus complete, and Phineas is never revalidated or even validated at all by Abel, leaving him more in-valid than ever.

Additionally, even though Abel Fletcher dies, and Phineas develops into a fully grown adult, he nevertheless continues to be infantilized, for John and Ursula Halifax symbolically adopt him as another one of their children. After his father's death, Phineas explains, "John and Ursula [...] demanded with one voice, 'Brother, come home'" (221); like a child, Phineas obeys this order to move in with them, hastily abandoning all of his plans to live on his own. And by referring to him as 'Brother,' the Halifaxes not only welcome him into their home but also equate themselves with the socially superior Phineas². Moreover, since they do the equating, not Phineas, they impose their authority over the invalid and, true to his weak and passive nature, Phineas allows the little social status he has left to be publicly renounced. But, having always been dependent on others because of his illnesses, the in-valid is quite content to live with the Halifaxes. In his new home, he is given epithets of 'Brother' and 'Uncle' but,

in reality, it is clear that Phineas has really become the eldest Halifax child, though he is older than both John and Ursula. Accordingly, he eventually begins to treat his friends like parents, just as they consider him one of their children; he himself admits as much when describing his relationship with Ursula: "My name for her was always emphatically 'the mother' - the truest type of motherhood I ever knew" (223). It is, indeed, the truest type of motherhood that Phineas has ever experienced, for his own mother died when he was an infant, so Ursula becomes a surrogate mother for him in his adult infancy. Phineas also begins referring to John as 'the father' in his narrative, signifying John's replacement of Phineas's own father, and cementing his own position as John's 'child.' When important decisions are made concerning the Halifax family, Phineas waits with the children to hear the results, rather than entering into consultation with the parents; he is, as Sally Mitchell describes, a "passive, helpless,[...] and avid spectator to events in which he can take no part" (49). And though he owns property which he inherited from Abel, Phineas has John handle the business for him, much like a father handles the affairs of his child: "John held and managed for me the sole remnant of landed property which my poor father had left me" (Craik 230). Phineas thus remains an infantilized adult for the rest of the novel, which is further marginalization for the already invalid-ated narrator.

But the most significant form of marginalization and invalid-ation which Phineas experiences is the fact that he is often ignored and even forgotten altogether by his friends, family, and society in general. During the famine riots, the entire town of Norton Bury is oblivious to Phineas's presence, despite the fact that he stands near his friend to defend Abel's house: "no one noticed me" (84). Even John is not aware of

Phineas, though he is only a few feet away: "I do not think he saw me" (87). During the Kingswell election a few years later, Phineas again fades completely from view, despite the fact that he is a land-owning gentleman; John, on the other hand, becomes a hero, saving the town from electing the ignoble candidate, even though he has to evoke an obscure law which allows him to assume rights from his wife, the daughter of a freeman, thus making John eligible to vote. Later, as the focus of the novel shifts from Phineas's friendship with John to John's married life with Ursula and their family, Phineas continues to fade gradually into the background, appearing only occasionally and briefly. True to form, the invalid passively allows himself to become a non-entity, never attempting to assert his presence to anyone - including himself: "For me - where I sat I do not clearly know, nor probably did any one else" (190), so forgettable is Phineas. Showalter describes him as "the crippled looker-on at other people's happy marriages and lives, permanently disbarred from such joy" (18), not only because of his infantilization and feminization, but also because of his easily-forgotten status within his home. And it is not just characters in the novel who neglect Phineas; the readers of the novel occasionally forget him, as well. Often, the only way which readers remember Phineas at all is, ironically, when he comments in his narrative on people ignoring him: "Probably they [Ursula and Lady Caroline] thought I was away too - or else they took no notice of me - and went talking on" (Craik 200). This is a frequent occurrence in the Halifax household: "They [John and Ursula] had altogether forgotten any one's presence" (208), especially that of the in-valid Phineas. Thus, like Mary Lennox at the end of *The Secret Garden*, Phineas tends to fade from view in the novel, despite the fact that he is the narrator, and so becomes the most marginalized and in-

validated character discussed in this thesis.

In contrast to Colin Craven and Klara Sesemann, then, Phineas is doomed to remain a social in-valid for the rest of his life, because he is never able to revalidate himself or reaffirm his masculinity; instead, he, like Mary Lennox, remains socially marginalized. He is feminized both by his illnesses and by his self-described 'womanish' character, and is thus the complete opposite to the robust, masculine gentleman which Victorian society idealized. Also, he never experiences a 'miracle cure' in the novel, and so remains ill and feeble, the physical antithesis to Lois Keith's 'straight and upright' man. Though he develops into a fully grown adult, Phineas is never treated like one, for he is still sickly, which leads his emotionally-distant father to consider him a perpetual infant. Moreover, Abel Fletcher passes on the 'family business' to his new, surrogate son, John, who himself later renounces the invalid's status by 'adopting' the grown man as one of his children, thereby further infantilizing him. Additionally, Phineas is unable and unwilling to establish conventional class relations with both Jael and John, his social inferiors, which adds to the destabilization of his social position as a middle-class gentleman. In fact, so invalid-ated is Phineas that his very existence is often forgotten by society and even his friends and family. Thus, Phineas is forced to remain in the margins of society, which itself is a reflection of Phineas's 'womanish' character and behaviour. And, as James Adams notes, it was believed that "the gentleman's status [...] derives from, and is made visible in, his body" (152), so an effeminate cripple like Phineas could never be considered a true gentleman. Showalter's assessment of Prince Dolor's situation in Craik's *The Little Lame Prince* effectively sums up Phineas's position in *John Halifax, Gentleman*: "As

with many of Craik's heroes, his dilemma seems feminine. Deprived of physical power, education, companionship, mobility, and a future, he accepts all these conditions as natural, and becomes gentle instead of bitter" (8); Phineas thus remains the epitome of Price-Herndl's "unmanned" man.

Notes

¹But his new friendship with John actually helps Phineas in his relationship with the housekeeper, for the invalid's desire to be with John is greater than his fear of Jael, though the fear, nevertheless, remains: "What that excellent woman did say [about meeting John] I have not the slightest recollection. I only remember that it did not frighten and grieve me as such attacks used to do" (Craik 30).

²Though Ursula is initially socially superior to both John and Phineas, she, as a woman, inherits her husband's lowly social status upon marriage. This will be discussed further in my Conclusion.

Conclusion

“Sickness shows us what we are”

- Latin Proverb

Whereas Colin Craven transforms at the end of *The Secret Garden* into a physical, athletic equal to Dickon Sowerby, Phineas Fletcher never comes to reflect his robust friend, John Halifax. Instead, in keeping with his ‘womanish’ character, Phineas becomes associated with Ursula March-Halifax, the woman who married his best friend. Both are social in-valids who must make their own place in a society which rigidly upholds traditional gender expectations, social boundaries, and class distinctions. Ursula, though, is marginalized by her very gender, like all women in Victorian society, despite the fact that she is a member of the lower gentry and the daughter of a gentleman. By marrying John Halifax, her social inferior, Ursula is forced to renounce her high social standing and, instead, must become the wife of a tanner and the Angel of a modest, bourgeois household.

It is not surprising that Phineas is closely linked with Ursula, for the two are quite similar in many ways, despite their differences in gender. Each ignores society’s dictates by befriending the poor John Halifax, regardless of the implications for themselves of such a friendship with a social inferior. They both vigorously defend John to his critics, including those who are of a higher social standing than they are themselves. Later, they both become totally dependent on John, despite their initial social and financial superiority over him, and they rely on him for safety and security for the rest of their lives. Additionally, both Phineas and Ursula do not conform to conventional Victorian expectations and ideals of physical appearances for their

respective genders. As previously discussed, Phineas is completely feminized by his illnesses and his self-admitted 'womanish' character, which leave him infirm and feeble, instead of athletic and robust: "from my birth I had been puny and diseased" (Craik 34). Ursula, on the other hand, is described as being "rather tall, of a figure built more for activity and energy than mere fragility of sylph-like grace [...]. Scarcely beautiful; and 'pretty' would have been the very last word to have applied to her" (108); her appearance, then, is thoroughly opposite to the small and delicate female frame considered ideal by most of Victorian society. Yet both Phineas and Ursula have accepted their physical incongruities, which further reflects their respective unconventional attitudes towards society's expectations of them as members of the middle-class. However, the result of such non-conformity to social expectations does have a price: Phineas is rarely taken seriously by society and is often ignored altogether, while Ursula has difficulties of her own.

Much like Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, Ursula experiences a new level of invalid-ation as she adjusts to her new life. As a woman, Ursula was already marginalized in society, though she is the daughter of a gentleman, simply because of her gender. She thus belongs to what Henry James referred to as "the sickly half of humanity," a term which critic Elaine Showalter elaborates on in her examination of *John Halifax, Gentleman*: "To Dinah Mulock Craik it [the sickly half of humanity] meant women - invalids, as doctors confidently claimed, by nature of their sex alone. Unmarried women were the cripples - thwarted in the only role which endowed their lives with meaning and weight; freaks in a society that had no use for them" (7). Marriage, then, is a means by which Victorian women could validate themselves in

society, yet this is not the case for Ursula who, upon her marriage to a social inferior, actively and consciously breaks with society's expectations of her as a member of the gentry. Thus, unlike Mary, Ursula's marginalization is the direct result of her choice to marry John, rather than an uncontrollable factor like illness or neglect, as it was for Mary. After all, a young woman traditionally aspired to marry a social superior in order to better herself and to ensure financial security for herself and her future children; as historian Judith Rosen notes, a Victorian woman's "'self-improvement' occurred via marriage and her absorption into a husband's wealth and position" (102-3). The same was not true for Victorian males, however, so John does not absorb his wife's wealth and high social rank; rather, Ursula is forced to inherit John's station in life. It does not matter that John's ancestors were apparently genteel, and that he himself is thoroughly gentlemanly in actions and attitudes; at the time of their engagement, John is socially inferior to Ursula, and she thus becomes in-validated by her marriage to him.

Ursula's union with John further marginalizes her because she is disowned by her only remaining relative, the snobbish Mr. Brithwood, who does not approve of the marriage: "She's nothing to me - I never wish to see her face again, the - the vixen!" (Craik 195). Though unkind, Mr. Brithwood nevertheless reiterates the fact that Ursula created this marginalization for herself by marrying her inferior: "That lady [...] has chosen to put herself away from her family, and her family can hold no further intercourse with her" (195). Brithwood's wife, Lady Caroline, sympathizes with Ursula but nevertheless stresses the fact that marriage should be the means to self-improvement, not invalidation: "Truly we women must marry, or be nothing at all. But as to marrying for love, as we used to think of, and as charming poets make believe -

my dear, nowadays, *nous avons changé tout cela*" (200). Lady Caroline thus represents the voice of her society, and even attempts to talk Ursula out of marrying John by appealing to the girl's common sense:

What! a bourgeois! a tradesman! with no more money than those sort of people usually have, I believe. You, who have had all sorts of comforts, have always lived as a gentlewoman. Truly, though I adore a love-marriage in theory, practically I think you are mad - quite mad, my dear. [...] Isn't it selfish to drag a pretty creature down, and make her a drudge, a slave - a mere poor man's wife? [...] Ah, child! you that know nothing of poverty, how can you bear it?

(201)

Ursula remains firm in her decision to marry John, however, and appears undaunted at the prospect of running a bourgeois home, insisting that she "will try" and "can learn" (201). She thereby disregards society's expectations of her and allows herself to become marginalized by her marriage to a social inferior.

Ironically, this actually may have been for the best, for it seems that Ursula would have had quite a lot of self-improving to do, had she married a social superior; despite her privileged upbringing, we learn, "she was not an accomplished young lady, and could neither sing nor play" (206). But in the early years of their marriage, before John becomes a successful and wealthy entrepreneur and banker, Ursula does not require such accomplishments; rather, she needs those skills necessary to run a modest bourgeois household. Yet she is marginalized even further because she initially does not possess even this ability, having never had the need as the daughter of a gentleman. This, then, becomes her self-improvement, as it is necessary for her to learn such skills

from Mrs. Jessop, her old nurse, as Mrs. Jessop herself reminds the young woman, “You know, my dear, you ought to begin and learn all about such things now. [...] And what lady need be ashamed of knowing how a dinner is cooked and a household kept in order?” (198). She has much to learn, even from her own lowly house maid; Phineas tells us that he “used to [...] listen to her voice and step about the house, teaching Jenny [the maid], or learning from her - for the young gentlewoman had much to learn, and was not ashamed of it either. She laughed at her own mistakes, and tried again” (213). Even Abel Fletcher comments upon “her little failings,” (219) but, in a rare act of tenderness from the Quaker, he begs John to be patient with his new wife. Necessity and love for her husband, though, make her a quick study, and soon Ursula is able to run an efficient, well-managed home: “she never was idle or dull for a minute. She did a great deal in the house herself. Often she would sit chatting with me [Phineas], having on her lap a coarse brown pan, shelling peas, slicing beans, picking gooseberries; her fingers - Miss March’s fair fingers - looking fairer for the contrast with their unaccustomed work” (213). Her choice to marry an inferior, then, is actually more empowering for Ursula than a loveless marriage to a superior would have been, for she effectively carves out a new place for herself in society as a happy bourgeois housewife, unlike her counterpart, Phineas, who is unable to fit in anywhere.

Of course, no discussion about disease and disability in nineteenth-century fiction is complete without an examination of one of the most beloved characters in all of literature, Tiny Tim in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. Tiny Tim is an idealized

figure, a gentle, pious, and optimistic little cripple who serves as a stark contrast to the mean and miserly Ebenezer Scrooge. Interestingly, notwithstanding his popularity, Tiny Tim is actually an extremely marginalized character; not only is he disabled, but he is also barely present in Dickens's story, appearing in only two scenes. And even in these two scenes, Tiny Tim is marginalized, for he is allowed only one line of direct dialogue, the line for which he is famous: "God bless us every one!" (Dickens 76). Everything else he says is recounted indirectly, usually by Bob Cratchit in conversation with his wife. Moreover, one of Tiny Tim's most important moments in the novel is a scene in which he is not even physically present, when Ebenezer Scrooge accompanies the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come to the Cratchit household and discovers Tiny Tim to be dead. Though deceased, Tiny Tim's spiritual presence is ubiquitous in the home, and the mournful scene before Scrooge's eyes softens even his hard heart, a crucial step in his transformation from miserable miser to kindly friend and "second father" (131) to Tiny Tim. Unlike Phineas Fletcher, then, who easily and often fades into the background, even within his own narrative, Tiny Tim is, perhaps, the most visible character in *A Christmas Carol*.

Despite such a strong presence in the story, however, very little attention is actually given to Tiny Tim's physical condition. Unlike Colin Craven and Klara Sesemann, Tiny Tim has no chance of recovering on his own or experiencing a miracle cure; as Kira Pirofski explains, "Dickens made it clear that Timothy Cratchet [sic] was disabled because Tim lived in a smoky, congested, poverty ridden tenement, and that his father, Bob Cratchet [sic], lacked the money needed to give his son proper health care" (par. 3). Pirofski further asserts, "This realistic representation of the causes,

social position, and treatment of disability was a breakthrough” (par. 3). What Pirofski (and others, including Dickens) fails to consider, however, is what Tiny Tim himself actually experiences as a disabled child. While there is much description of the experiences of the impoverished Cratchit family as a whole, there is no mention whatsoever of the limitations, isolation, or social invalid-ation which Tiny Tim, as an invalid, must experience on a daily basis. He, too, is feminized by his illnesses, for he is weak and pale, with a feeble voice and a “withered little hand” (Dickens 76), yet these facts are given almost in passing, with no mention of the repercussions they may have on the boy. Additionally, Tiny Tim’s actual life as a cripple is overshadowed by the sympathy his disability evokes from everyone, including the hard-hearted Ebenezer Scrooge. Yet this sympathy, though well-meaning, is just another form of invalid-ation for Tiny Tim, because he is set apart from everyone and considered in a different manner, different even from his fellow cripples, who are ridiculed or ignored by society. So, while *A Christmas Carol* may present a realistic view of Victorian poverty, it, like many other nineteenth-century novels, does not provide any details about the actual daily life and experiences of an in-valid child.

Since *John Halifax, Gentleman* is not intended for children, it is understandable that the in-valid, perpetually child-like character, Phineas Fletcher, is so easily overlooked by adult readers. Similarly, because *The Secret Garden* and *Heidi* are specifically children’s novels, the child in-valids are very visible protagonists to the young readers. This (in)visibility of in-valid children also corresponds with the

differing publication dates for these three novels: *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856) was published over twenty years before *Heidi* (1880), and over fifty years before *The Secret Garden* (1911). In Craik's novel, the in-valid character often is forgotten and disappears, even within his own narrative, but Burnett's two in-valids (and the number of disabled characters itself is significant) are the most prominent figures. Thus, in late-Victorian literature, diseased and disabled child characters like Klara, Mary, and Colin were more visible than in the earlier part of the century, a fact which, itself, coincides with the advances in medicine and science which gave in-valids a better chance of overcoming their illnesses and becoming healthy adults.

So, unlike other nineteenth-century novels, *The Secret Garden*, *Heidi*, and *John Halifax, Gentleman* (though to a lesser extent than the first two) all offer a more fully realized interpretation of the daily lives of disabled Victorian children, and actually highlight their disabilities by using these children as the protagonists. These novels also emphasize the traditional gender roles which were so idealized by Victorian society; as Ann Dowker notes, "The main difference between the treatment of girls and boys is that there is more stress on girls learning to be useful to their families, and on boys developing and demonstrating courage" (par. 9). Colin Craven and Klara Sesemann both experience 'miracle cures,' and thus are able to assimilate themselves successfully into society's expectations of their respective genders. But, just as in life, miracle cures are not common in nineteenth-century literature, and those who are infirm or disabled at the beginning of a Victorian novel usually remain infirm or disabled at the end of the story. Most invalids, including Mary Lennox and Phineas Fletcher, remain perpetually marginalized and invalid-ated.

Until recently, studies of disease and disability have been few and far between; for whatever reason, scholars have traditionally ignored invalidism in literature. This lack of interest, sadly, is not surprising; as Lois Keith notes, "Disability has always been a marginal issue to everyone except disabled people themselves and [...] interest in disability is marginal and 'specialist'" (7-8). What is surprising is the number of novels that have ill or disabled child characters in them, despite the scantiness of scholarly interest: "[T]here was hardly a girls' novel since 1850," Keith observes, "which didn't have a character who [...] became paralysed through tipping out of a carriage or was suffering from some nameless, crippling illness" (5). Though interest in disability studies in literature is slowly increasing, there are, nevertheless, very few works that consider the actual daily lives of the in-valids; fewer still examine the lives of ill or disabled children. Thus, in-valid children are marginalized even further by academic critics, who either overlook them entirely or focus solely on their actual diseases or disabilities, instead of their experiences with the marginalization and isolation that result from their conditions. As long as in-valid children continue to be neglected by scholars and authors, they will never be able to re-validate themselves to society; as the disabled critic Helen Aveling writes, "I want disabled characters to be as three-dimensional as their non-disabled peers; for them to be character first, and to have their disability treated as a secondary issue. [...] Only when writers realise this will we begin to see books written with 'real' disabled characters in them" (par. 6), like Colin Craven, Mary Lennox, Klara Sesemann, and Phineas Fletcher.

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