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Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, and Sara: Roles and Role Models in *A Little Princess*

[Elisabeth Rose Gruner](#)

Role-model criticism, the easiest and often most logical form of criticism for children's literature, has fallen out of favor in our more theoretically sophisticated times. Toril Moi, surveying the state of feminist criticism in 1985, devoted a chapter to "Images of Women" criticism, finding it overly prescriptive and frequently self-contradictory in its calls for a "realistic" or accurate depiction of women's lives simultaneously with the desire for "strong, impressive female characters" (47). Since many real women (and men!) are neither strong nor impressive, the effort is doomed from the start. And the specific call for "role models" is problematic in itself, for literature is an exchange between writer and readers: readers separated widely by historical circumstance, out of the control of the author and yet affected by him/her in incalculable ways. My role model is your anti-heroine, even in the same text. Yet as a politically-charged reading strategy, Moi goes on to say, "Images of Women" criticism broke new ground: its "will to take historical and sociological factors into account must [in the mid-seventies, coming out of the New Criticism] have seemed both fresh and exciting" (49). She doesn't suggest, however, how we might revive the best efforts of such work without lapsing into a naive ahistoricism or a vulgar model of textual reflectionism.

But I believe we must. When I recently taught a children's literature course I had a solid syllabus, a thorough survey of the field with exemplary "readings" of several of the key texts; and I had a solid class, many of them education students who would be starting their first jobs as elementary school teachers in about six months. Despite my thorough preparation, though, I wasn't fully prepared for where some of our discussions went (whoever is?): my students wanted to know about role models in the books and tales we were reading. Wasn't Cinderella a role model? If so, for whom or what? Some objected to our

feminist readings [End Page 163] of fairy tales. They granted that as role models, the fairy tale heroines were pretty passive and had limited options, but they argued that since children don't know that's a problem, it won't hurt them. Won't it? I had little to fall back on: I can't argue that children directly imitate the books they read, but I believe that just as the ingredients in their breakfast cereal can harm (or help) them without their knowledge of them, so too can the ideological constructs of the books they read. But how to make the case?

My test case is *A Little Princess*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1905 novel. I think it will make a good test because it is in some ways about reading and what reading does to us--what we learn from books and stories, and how, and why; and because it is a widely read novel, encountered by many children (well, mostly girls) over the past century; and, perhaps most importantly, because it raises the question of role models on at least three levels. The heroine, Sara, functions explicitly as a role model and teacher for several of the girls in the novel; she herself relies on at least one role model in her attempts to think about who she is becoming; and she may also be a role model for the children who have read and continue to read her story (not to mention the adults).

Rachel M. Brownstein, whose *Becoming a Heroine* incorporates many of the best aspects of role-model criticism, writes of her education as a reader in the 1950s in ways that may seem familiar to girl-readers today. She claims that "[a]dmiration of the heroine of a romantic novel--beautiful, wise, beloved, and lucky--is love for an idealized image of oneself" (xiv). The popularity of *A Little Princess* over the course of this century suggests that Sara may function as just such an idealized image for many readers--among them Lynne Sharon Schwartz, who writes that she was "shaped and nourished" by the book (Afterword 223). Schwartz finds in *A Little Princess* an authorization for the imaginative child to "live in imagination," and to make up stories (224). When we do so, we frequently appropriate details from an incongruous variety of sources, diverging from our models even as we use them. Peggy Bulger notes this tendency in an essay on children's imaginative play with dolls who are "action figures" from a TV show: "in make-believe, the child restructures observed situations, plots, characters, and behaviors into new forms, combining many cultural messages into a unified performance" (191). The girls she observes play with "Princess of Power" dolls who move easily from fighting intergalactic villains to going for ice cream with boyfriends--the latter, not a part of the TV show they have just watched. Simplistic "role model" criticism suggests some ready transfer from image to reality, from text to reader. But Bulger's essay demonstrates what we ought already to know: role models frequently fail to be what [End Page 164] their creators might have had in mind. The text doesn't control its interpretation; it only limits it. Role models exceed their functions, change, and perpetuate themselves whether we want them to or not. Albert Bandura, a cognitive psychologist who studies psychological modeling, notes that even in his field this remains a problem:

[M]any theorists have conceptualized modeling as *imitation*. They view it as a process by which one organism

matches the actions of another, usually close in time. The conceptualization of modeling as simply response mimicry has left a legacy that minimizes the power of modeling and has limited the scope of research for many years. . . . In actuality, in cultivating human competencies, modeling imparts conceptions and rules for generating variant forms of behavior to suit different purposes and circumstances (48).

When Sara Crewe models herself on a princess, then, or when her creator models her on Cinderella, or when children model themselves on her, "variant forms of behavior . . . to suit [their] different purposes and circumstances" may be generated. The question is, how greatly can they vary? Or, for my purposes, can a feminist find value in these anti- or non-feminist models; and if so, how? In what follows, I will argue that she can, through the specific story-telling strategies which Burnett employs, and through historically-informed reading strategies that recognize but do not limit us to the models our favorite texts appropriate. ¹

Sara Crewe first appeared in print in 1888, the subject of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novella of the same name. The plot of "Sara Crewe, or What Happened at Miss Minchin's," is familiar: Sara Crewe is a Cinderella figure whose story begins with the loss of her fortune--derived, in part, from diamond mines in India--and ends in its restoration. Sara lived in Burnett's imagination, clearly--over the next eighteen years. Burnett revised the tale, first into a play and finally into the novel *A Little Princess*, fleshing out Sara's life at school before her father's failure and death and developing her connections to India. I'm working primarily from the novel in this essay, but, in both versions, school story and Cinderella story combine in an uneasy negotiation between realism and romance. ² As in the gothic novel much earlier in the century, what seem truly "magical" or romantic elements in the novel are provided with reasonable, "realistic" explanations, while--as, for example, in *Jane Eyre* or in many of Dickens's "realistic" novels--coincidence functions to provide the magical happy ending of romance. Both Sara and her creator weave together romance and realism into a single narrative, which, in Sara's case--and perhaps in the reader's as well--is used both to console and, increasingly, to educate, by word and example. [End Page 165]

Sara functions in the novel in several different, but overlapping, roles. We see her first and always as a "princess," so named in the first chapter. In school she quickly becomes the imaginative child whose chief attraction (besides her fabulous clothes) is as a storyteller; she later develops this skill into the ability to teach. During her period of degradation these two roles of storyteller and teacher are still relevant, but she is primarily a worker. Finally, we see her as a mother-figure to the children of the Large Family, just as she has been from the first to Lottie. (This role, like that of storyteller before the "fall," is negligible in the novella, fully developed in the novel.) These roles do not stand alone, however. Encased in narrative, they mark moments in Sara's development and demonstrate the ways in which Burnett modulates between and diverges from her own generic models (the Cinderella story and the school story) to emphasize the pedagogical and developmental value of narrative. ³

But first, a word about Cinderella, who seems to be Sara's primary, if unacknowledged, model. The tale is of obscure, perhaps Chinese or Indian, origin, but it has been retold in almost every folk tradition for centuries. The version most of us are most familiar with, the Disney version, is based on a seventeenth-century retelling by Charles Perrault--a version popularized in late Victorian England by Andrew Lang's translation (1888).⁴ The essential elements of the Cinderella story are these: "an ill-treated though rich and worthy heroine in Cinders-disguise; the aid of a magical gift or advice by a beast/bird/mother substitute; the dance/festival/church scene where the heroine comes in radiant display; recognition through a token" (Yolen 298). This bare structure indicates little about how the heroine responds to her ill-treatment or her role in her eventual recognition, however. In Disney's version, as in Perrault's, Cinderella arrives at her maturity by patiently enduring the hardships inflicted on her by other women, cheerfully acquiescing in domestic drudgery, and finally captivating the handsome prince who can reward her with marriage and riches.

Cinderella was wildly popular in Victorian England, and versions of her story cross the boundaries of high and low art, children's and adult fiction.⁵ While many theories have been advanced for Cinderella's popularity in the period, the confluence of two important historical developments may help account for it. First, as Jack Zipes has shown, the British vogue for the "literary fairy tale" occurred rather late relative to the rest of Europe, arriving really only at mid-century, when a taste for didactic children's fiction was already well-established (*Victorian Fairy Tales*, xiii). Cinderella's easy adaptation to the didactic is obvious: in the dominant versions, she is rewarded for Victorian feminine virtues of self-sacrifice, **[End Page 166]** cheerful obedience, and quiet beauty.⁶ Second, "Cinderella," like so many favorite Victorian tales, dramatizes a class mobility that is really not one: that is, while she can seem--like so many self-made men of the period--to rise to wealth on her own merits, her elevation is always carefully accounted for as well by her "birth," her "natural" goodness and, more importantly, nobility.⁷ The tale thus offers a fantasy of "true" heroism that does not challenge the prevailing ideologies of class and nobility which industrial capitalism, the expansion of the suffrage, Chartism, and other historical changes were beginning to erode.

Author and critic Jane Yolen notes that Disney's version is unusually passive; many Cinderellas (such as the more assertive heroine of the version the Grimms collected) fight for their rights or at least take an active role in the restoration of their fortunes.⁸ But she notes that retellings of the tale in the late Victorian period (from 1870 on) fall into two categories: "The retellings which merely translate European variants contain the hardy heroine. But when a new version is presented, a helpless Cinderella is born." In one version she cites from the children's magazine *St. Nicholas*--the magazine in which Frances Hodgson Burnett published "Sara Crewe"--the Cinderella figure is "a weepy, prostrate young blonde . . . [who] stands before the prince . . . [with] downcast eyes and extended hand" (299). This passive Cinderella is an obvious precursor to the

familiar Disney model, who only substitutes cheerful patience for the weepiness. Karen Rowe, in her classic essay "Feminism and Fairy Tales," reads such heroines as demonstrating that "[s]tatus and fortune never result from the female's self-exertion but from passive assimilation into her husband's sphere" (246). Marked by beauty, cheerfulness, and passivity, this version of Cinderella was a favorite model for Victorian writers seeking to shore up an increasing fragile ideal of femininity: she represents maturity without growth or internal change. The perpetual child, with some domestic skills, is a perfect adult woman. ⁹ My students, raised on Disney's Cinderella and still enamored of her tale, objected to this--as it seemed to them--overly didactic feminist reading, trying hard to find value in the tale they loved. They were not alone in their struggle.

Huang Mei suggests that the Cinderella story, even in its Victorian manifestations, is more complex than Rowe's analysis would suggest. Noting the popularity of the tale as a source for novels from Richardson's *Pamela* on, she suggests both that Perrault's Cinderella is more active than we might have thought, and that even the Pamelized Cinderella of the nineteenth-century novel may provide a model--however ambivalent--for resistance to patriarchal domination. Perrault's Cinderella, she notes, inserts herself into the drama of the shoe-fitting in order to bring herself to **[End Page 167]** the prince's attention. She also, perhaps more importantly, plays with her stepsisters' impressions of the ball, questioning them about the mysterious lady (herself) and playfully asking them to allow her to see this "paragon" the next night. Huang Mei comments:

Even allowing for her justifiable wish to keep the secret and avoid probable harm, there is absolutely no need for such inventive and self-pleased improvising. At this moment she looks more a born actress and an experienced schemer than a submissive heroine. This difference from the Sleeping Beauty, who essentially does nothing except sleep and dream, is important and points to the central paradox of the tale: on the one hand, the heroine is praised for her humility, her patience and self-effacement; yet on the other hand, all the vivid details hint at a longing and plotting girl. . . . With her partly suppressed and partly suggested wishes (as conveyed by the broken sentence "I wish I could--") coming true in the end, that aspiring girl is ultimately affirmed and supported by the narrative structure. . . . This ambiguous pattern lends itself readily to the novelistic imagination, and . . . women novelists, with special eagerness and anxiety, respond[ed] to this structuring paradox of the Cinderella theme (5).

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As many critics have noted, Frances Hodgson Burnett was one of those women novelists who found the Cinderella theme particularly fruitful. Phyllis Bixler argues that Burnett works variations on the theme of the dispossessed heiress or heir in her three major books for children; *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Sara*, and *Mary Lennox* all, after struggling with adversity, achieve recognition and reward for patience and inherent nobility (87). Sara Crewe of *A Little Princess* most obviously resembles Cinderella in her class fall and in the hardships inflicted on her by a cruel "stepmother," the schoolteacher Miss Minchin. Like Cinderella, Sara is ultimately rewarded with the restoration of her fortunes--after, of course, the requisite sojourn in the

kitchen. But Burnett's Cinderella demonstrates some significant advances over her predecessors: Sara's fortunes are not restored by marriage, nor is her endurance either mute or passive. Like Perrault's heroine (in Huang Mei's reading), Sara also plays an active role in her redemption; not, however, through "longing and plotting" but through imaginative invention and sympathy. A Cinderella in the schoolroom, Sara expands and qualifies the model she inhabits. Burnett's version of Cinderella, like other Victorian adaptations, calls into question aspects of the "original" (or familiar) version while capitalizing on that familiarity. Yet Burnett's is hardly a critique, as for example Anne Thackeray Ritchie's version of the tale is; rather, Burnett's various versions function as commentaries and/or supplements to the familiar story. ¹¹ [End Page 168]

The Princess

Cinderella only becomes a princess after she marries her prince, but Sara is one throughout the novel. When I began work on this topic, I wondered which princesses might be models for a late-century fairy tale: Victoria's daughters, perhaps, or Victoria herself, as reconstituted through nostalgic tale-telling? Would I find an earlier princess, a forgotten source shared by other authors? I did not expect to find the role model I did: Marie Antoinette, the deposed and beheaded queen, famous (to me, at least) only for her frivolity and her injunction to the peasants: "Let them eat cake!" Hardly a positive role model, one might think.

But Marie Antoinette's function in this text demonstrates, perhaps best of all, the complex and contradictory ways in which role modelling works. For the Marie Antoinette of *A Little Princess* is hardly the one I remembered; and she diverges as well from her own primary models in nineteenth-century histories and biographies. Burnett's (or Sara's) Marie Antoinette is a noble and determined woman, a model of fortitude and resistance for the orphaned Sara. Sara tells of Marie Antoinette "when she was in prison and her throne was gone and she had only a black gown on, and her hair was white, and they insulted her and called her Widow Capet. She was a great deal more like a queen then than when she was so gay and everything was so grand" (124). This passage, in which Sara so explicitly draws a parallel between her own exiled state and that of the queen, recalls Carlyle's description of the dethroned queen in *The French Revolution*: "Marie-Antoinette, in this her utter abandonment, and hour of extreme need, is not wanting to herself, the imperial woman. Her look, they say, as that hideous Indictment was reading, continued calm. . . . You discern, not without interest . . . how she bears herself queenlike" (367). ¹² As she looks at Miss Minchin, Sara uses the image of Marie-Antoinette as a touchstone, even imagining that she is herself the exiled princess: "You don't know that you are saying these things to a princess, and that if I chose I could wave my hand and order you to execution. I only spare you because I *am* a princess, and you are a poor, stupid, unkind, vulgar old thing, and don't know any better" (124). Sara's imaginative violence against Miss Minchin is ironic in context: rewriting the specific history of the French Revolution, she imagines execution as a power of the monarch (a power withheld through nobility), identifying with the beheaded queen as an emblem of endurance against Miss Minchin's tyranny of the vulgar. Sara's

identification with the noble martyrs of the French Revolution is thorough-going: her attic becomes a Bastille, she becomes Marie Antoinette, [End Page 169] and Becky--whom Sara has previously imagined as the romantic and passive Sleeping Beauty--is now her fellow-prisoner. Even Melchisedec becomes "a Bastille rat sent to be my friend" (105).

Critics have noted, rather caustically, that "Mrs Burnett's passion for princesses and angelic children was at odds with her respect for individuality and democracy," and *A Little Princess* amply demonstrates the problem (Cadogan and Craig 68). ¹³ Although Sara claims that she and Becky are "just the same--only two little girls," Becky continues to insist that Sara is "a princess all the same," and throughout the novel Sara's innate nobility always reveals itself (83). This innate nobility recalls the Marie Antoinette of conservative iconographers like Carlyle and his predecessor Edmund Burke: an emblem of resistance to vulgar tyranny rather than a tyrant herself. So while Marie Antoinette certainly seems a problematic role model, we might need to look closer to see what elements of the original Sara and her creator appropriate, and how they work within the text.

Sara refers directly to the French queen only once, in her reverie about the meaning of nobility for an impoverished girl. The queen is here already deposed, already "the Widow Capet," beautiful, noble, and unjustly oppressed--in bare outline, a not surprising model for the hungry and imaginative girl. "She was stronger than they were," Sara thinks to herself, "even when they cut her head off." Burnett's narrator adds, "[t]his was not a new thought, but quite an old one, by this time"--implying that Marie Antoinette is the touchstone, *the* princess, when Sara fantasizes about being a princess (125).

As Claudia L. Johnson notes, Burke's famous peroration to Marie Antoinette--from which Carlyle's derives--ends with a lesson on taste. Revolutionary philosophy, for Burke, is "destitute of all taste and elegance." And he concludes that "there ought to be a system of manners in every nation which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish" (171-72). Sara, too, sets up the opposition between taste and vulgarity as if they were synonymous with good and evil, and she uses her status as princess--even her identification with Marie Antoinette--to stand for her essential goodness against Miss Minchin's cruelty. The identification is clearly problematic--but when we return to her use of it as a teacher, we will see another aspect of the queen and the role model.

The Storyteller

Although Sara strongly resembles Cinderella in her plight, her response to it differs significantly. Unlike Cinderella, who--even in Huang Mei's [End Page 170] reading--is essentially static throughout her tale, Sara grows, and she grows through the exercise of imagination--specifically, storytelling. By narrating her own and her companions' stories, imaginatively embellished, Sara learns about oppression and injustice, and "mothers" herself and her orphaned companions into a more vital and fulfilling adolescence than the school otherwise provides. Storytelling supplies the absent mother to

some of the students at the school, including Sara herself. In a revealing episode, Sara makes, as a jealous schoolfellow, claims, "fairy stories about heaven" to console the youngest child in the school, Lottie. In telling her stories, she becomes a mother-figure for Lottie, who calls her "Mamma Sara"; she also supplies her own lack, "forgetting herself" in her story and becoming the mother she has lost (40). The lost mother supplies another link to Cinderella, who is always motherless and who in many versions is aided by her mother's spirit or by some tangible token of her mother (a doll, in the Russian "Vassilissa the Fair," for example, or a hazel tree in the German "Aschenputtel"). ¹⁴

Storytelling is key, of course, to oral tradition tales like "Cinderella," and Marina Warner suggests that we recall the storytelling tradition when we read these tales, allowing a shift in focus to the maternal rather than the child's point of view:

Imagine the characteristic scene, the child listening to an older person telling this story, and the absent mother materializes in the person of the narrator herself. . . . If the storyteller is an old woman, the old wife of the old wives' tale, a nurse or a governess, she may be offering herself as a surrogate to the vanished mother in the story. Within the stories themselves, the narrator frequently accedes symbolically to the story in the person of the fairy godmother (215).

If we take Warner's suggestion and link narration to the mother/godmother figure, Sara may function as both Cinderella and fairy godmother, taking her fate into her own hands or at least directing it through the exercise of the imagination, through narrative. Throughout the novel, Sara's storytelling imagination is her mainstay, her defense against the violence and degradation by a world controlled by the tyranny of the vulgar and cruel.

In the novella, we get little of Sara's life before the loss of her father and her fortune; she begins, as Cinderella usually does, already degraded, fallen from some barely-imaginable state of grace. In her fallen state, we see Sara first as a truth-teller: asked by Miss Minchin for some recognition of the headmistress's "kindness in giving [her] a home," Sara replies, "You are not kind. . . . You are not kind" (81). In a contrast that is further developed in the novel, we learn that Miss Minchin is, in Sara's eyes at **[End Page 171]** least, a congenital liar. As she compliments Sara and her father on their first meeting, Sara thinks "Why does she say I am a beautiful child? . . . I am not beautiful at all. . . . She is beginning by telling a story" (11). "Story" resonates throughout the novel, but only here does it have the negative valence of a lie. The contrast between Sara's truth-telling, ¹⁵ which involves fantasy and imaginative storytelling, and Miss Minchin's lying, seems preeminently a contrast in taste: Miss Minchin is vulgar, Sara is a "little princess." Later, Sara and her fellow student Ermengarde strike their pedagogical bargain: Sara will read Ermengarde's books and impart their contents to their friend. When Ermengarde suggests that she simply allow her father to believe that she has read the books Sara has agreed to tell her about, Sara responds, "That's almost like telling lies . . . and lies--well, you see, they're not only wicked--they're *vulgar*." And she continues, in case the

point was unclear, "Sometimes . . . I've thought perhaps I might do something wicked--I might suddenly fly into a rage and kill Miss Minchin, you know, when she was ill-treating me--but I *couldn't* be vulgar" (159). "Princess" Sara's innate nobility, which might rebel against oppression but cannot lie, remains a theme throughout the novel.

Elizabeth Keyser writes of the exchange with Miss Minchin that "for Miss Minchin, lying has become second nature; for Sara, who values the truth, lying would have to be a conscious, deliberate act. At this point Sara is unaware that her own kind of storytelling, while capable of revealing and preserving truth, can also become a way of unconsciously obscuring it" (234). While it is true that Sara's tales can conceal truth--the truth, for example, that the attic is cold and bare, or that she is destitute--this actually seems to me quite a conscious act on Sara's part, and one that is increasingly difficult for her to accomplish. We see her, for example, tell Ermengarde that she usually supposes the attic in which she lives is the Bastille: "Sometimes I try to pretend it is another kind of place; but the Bastille is generally easiest--particularly when it is cold" (105). Far from *unconsciously* obscuring truth, Sara's stories consciously alter in order to improve it.

And Sara's language seems also to have the power to predict and even create, as when she "*supposes*" finding a sixpence to buy buns and immediately finds fourpence (Burnett's attempt at undermining coincidence?); or when she assists Becky and Ermengarde in imagining a banquet hall for their late-night "feast" and is rewarded later that night with the first donations of Ram Dass and "the Indian gentleman," whose "magic" decorates her attic and sustains her through the final chapters of **[End Page 172]** the book (141 and 167-79). Stories, then, create an improved reality both for Sara and for her fellows.

While Miss Minchin uses story to conceal and manipulate, Sara uses it to understand and to create. Thus when Ermengarde marvels at Sara's ability to bring history alive for her, Sara responds, "Everything is a story--everything in this world. You are a story--I am a story--Miss Minchin is a story. You can make a story out of anything" (*Sara Crewe*, 24; a similar passage occurs in *Princess* 105). Lynne Sharon Schwartz found this passage resonated for her, as a child and as a writer: "And since it is all a story, how much better to make it up for ourselves than to let the world make it up for us" (225). When Sara "make[s] it up for" herself, the scullery maid Becky (an addition in the novel) becomes Sleeping Beauty; a rat in the attic becomes Melchisedec; and Sara herself becomes a princess--but a princess who is also, and essentially, a teacher.

The Teacher

Sara teaches through her stories, in both novel and novella. Like most school stories, ¹⁶ *A Little Princess* actually has little to say about either pedagogy or the actual content of the school day. Indeed, the students seem to spend little time in the classroom, except in set pieces to demonstrate Sara's superiority to the school's teaching (see esp. chap. 2, "A French Lesson," and chap. 11, "Ram Dass"). Miss Minchin is clearly unable to teach her girls much, thus leaving room for Sara to

demonstrate her superiority as teacher in impromptu "classes" in the attic. She helps Ermengarde with her French, for example, which Ermengarde later says is going "ever so much better since the last time I came up here and you explained the conjugations" (160). The youngest girl, Lottie, too, "is doing her sums so well . . . because she creeps up here, too, and I help her" (160-61). Since Miss Minchin is explicitly using Sara to teach "the younger children French and to hear their other lessons," it seems odd that it is these extra sessions in the attic that accomplish the most good (85). It may be that Miss Minchin's preferred pedagogy is one of recitations--already outmoded by the late nineteenth century,¹⁷ but suggested indeed by the fact that Sara "hears" the children's other lessons--and that the narrative method Sara employs in the attic is preferable.

Sara also teaches history, and she teaches it again through story. Here I believe both the content and the technique of her teaching are central to the meaning of the book. The history Sara teaches is the history of the French Revolution, a history she seems to know well even before she [**End Page 173**] reads Carlyle's version of it in a book she borrows from Ermengarde.¹⁸ Marie Antoinette, of course, figures implicitly in Sara's teaching on the French Revolution. Sara teaches Ermengarde through "the gory records of the French Revolution . . . [telling] such stories of it that Ermengarde's eyes grew round with alarm and she held her breath" (160). While the queen is not specifically mentioned in this section, her friend the Princesse de Lamballe figures prominently (with her head on a pike, and "beautiful floating blonde hair" [160]). The justificatory strategy here seems plain: Sara is not a rebel but a deposed monarch. As we have seen, this version of the monarch was preferred by conservative iconographers, and seems to have been the dominant image in the English imagination. Historian and biographer Charles Duke Yonge, for example, found in Marie Antoinette one of his "Seven Heroines of Christendom." He enthusiastically describes her thus:

Her grace and beauty, maturing and improving as she grew up to womanhood, were the theme of every tongue and of every pen; while the fame of her virtues, her purity, her gentleness, her universal affability and courtesy, her boundless and ever-active charity and humanity, reaches to the most distant provinces, and awakened in thousands of those who were too distant or too lowly in rank to witness her splendour lively feelings of love and gratitude (13-14).

For Yonge, the queen is explicitly a role model. He ends his biography of her with a call to his readers to emulate one who, "surrounded . . . by unexampled dangers and calamities . . . showed herself equal to every vicissitude of fortune, and superior to its worst frowns. . . . [One who] bore her accumulated miseries with a serene resignation, an intrepid fortitude, a true heroism of soul of which the history of the world does not afford a brighter example" (431-32). While Burnett makes no such explicit claims for her heroine, surely these are the kinds of qualities she wants her readers to link with her own deposed princess, and to emulate as well.

Even a more even-handed biographer like Julia Kavanagh admits to sympathy for the queen, finding her not evil or cruel but simply ill-educated. In her *Woman in France during the Nineteenth Century*, Kavanagh writes of the queen that while "in every external matter, she was perfectly accomplished[;] she failed in those essential points which it is the duty of true education to develop. . . . She wanted the sagacity and courageous calmness which distinguished the empress-queen [her mother]" (7). And, even more tellingly, "[s]he, whose part in history was to be so dark and tragic, never perused those historical narratives whence she might, perchance, have derived a few useful lessons" (57).¹⁹ The queen who never read history then becomes the subject for historians; by **[End Page 174]** learning and teaching history herself, Sara avoids such faults and revises the model she has appropriated. Sara tells the kinds of tales the queen had avoided and learns them herself; later, when she is "restored," she will revise the queen's history again.

For Sara, then, the tyrant Miss Minchin becomes an emblem of the revolutionary mob, tyrannical in its cruelty and vulgarity; while Sara herself becomes the princess, loyalty to whom becomes an emblem of what Burke laments as gone forever with the age of chivalry: "that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom" (169).²⁰ Burke's self-consciously literary technique here provides, as Claudia Johnson argues, "not an unadulterated narration of historical fact, but itself a scene from the pages of gothic-pathetic literature." Burke insists, Johnson claims, "that insofar as literature still taught us to lament the fall of princesses, it was a better school for morality than enlightenment philosophy" (2-3). Sara's stories, too, are a "better school for morality" than Miss Minchin's recitations, and her better-educated version of Marie Antoinette makes her a better role model for her late-century readers.

The Worker

Where Sara differs from Marie Antoinette--indeed, from most princesses, real or imagined--is in her work, and her work in the novel interestingly allies her with a class of heroines with whom she otherwise has little in common: the "new girls" of late nineteenth-century popular fiction. As Sally Mitchell explains, although most middle-class girls still expected to stay at home until married and not to work outside the home afterwards, "popular girls' books [at late-century] came to construct paid work--even for a suddenly impoverished heroine--as not merely a necessary evil but also a great adventure" (23). One of Sara's first--and very unprincess-like--thoughts on being informed of her father's death is to ask if she may work to help support herself. Her work is, of course, depicted as grueling and unpleasant; she is tyrannized by Miss Minchin and the cook, often going hungry because one or the other deprives her of a meal for imagined offenses. Yet her work also constructs her as a useful and functioning member of society and provides the materials for stories with which she "delight[s]" her new family at the end of the novel (216). Working, Sara can move about the city with a freedom unattainable to the privileged parlor

boarder she once was; working, she learns the reality behind the "stories about children who were poor and had no mammas and papas to [End Page 175] fill their stockings . . . who were, in fact, cold and thinly clad and hungry," those stories that inspire the young "Guy Clarence" of the Large Family to give her his sixpence (109). Working, she can also afford to bore a hole in that sixpence and keep it around her neck rather than spend it. But Sara's true work is never running errands, or even teaching French; her true work, as Burnett depicts it, is mothering.

The Mother

Orphaned Sara can not be expected to know much about mothering, but in fact it is her primary talent, her original skill. ²¹ Even before her "fall" into servanthood, she exercises her talent with Lottie, the spoiled baby of Miss Minchin's school. Four-year-old Lottie, also motherless, uses her status as a weapon, throwing tantrums at the slightest provocation. Sara, alone in the school, is able to quiet Lottie--not surprisingly, with a story--and earns, as we have seen, the title, "Mamma Sara."

Miss Minchin's school, like most "reformed" boarding schools of late-century, seems purposely formed on a non-familial model. ²² Miss Minchin is always, defiantly, unmarried "Miss," and she never acts as surrogate mother to her charges. Even her sister, the kinder Miss Amelia, never seems maternal--she's at a loss, for example, to deal with Lottie's tantrums (although her build in the recent movie adaptation may be intended to convey motherliness). But Sara, though she is only eleven, is repeatedly characterized as maternal; as if to suggest that the all-female setting requires a mother, as if to suggest that to mother is the ultimate expression of a girl's, if not a princess's, duties. Carlyle pointedly reminds us of Marie Antoinette's maternity in his vision of her; perhaps Sara's identification with her is so thorough-going as to extend even to this. ²³

Sara's "maternity," though, takes at least two different forms. One is her "adoption" of Lottie, early in the novel. Throughout the text Lottie identifies with Sara as a surrogate mother, in what is seemingly a fairly conventional relationship. Sally Mitchell suggests that this is a frequent pattern in school stories and that "new girls" were often even assigned to older ones and expected to emulate what she calls their "corporate values instead of [their] real mother's home ways" (88). The second, and to my mind more important, form of Sara's maternity is her story-telling pedagogy. As I've discussed, her stories teach--both the content material, for example, the French Revolution, and a less tangible sympathy or identification. Narrative, within the novel and perhaps of the novel itself, allows for sympathetic identification and even for moral growth. And the Victorian mother's primary task was, of course, moral teaching. ²⁴ But it is [End Page 176] teaching of a peculiarly passive kind: Joan N. Burstyn notes, for example, that "by the cultivation of characteristics particularly feminine--self-denial, forbearance, fidelity--women were to teach the whole world how to live in virtue. They were to do this not by writing books about moral values, nor by preaching about them in public, 'but by manifesting them hour by hour in each home by the magic

of the voice, look, word, and all the incommunicable graces of woman's tenderness" (32). ²⁵ This kind of "manifestation"--role modeling--allows the mother to work without "working." ²⁶

Recent work in moral development suggests that narrative may indeed serve a developmental function. Mark Tappan and Lyn Mikel Brown argue, for example, that "[i]ndividuals develop morally by 'authoring' their own moral stories and by learning the lessons in the stories they tell about the moral experiences in their lives" (180). Sara's stories are not often her own, however, until--at the end of the novel--she tells her benefactor and the children of the "Large Family" of her days of hunger and distress. Nonetheless, her tales of history and romance seem to function similarly in terms of both her own and her friends' moral and sympathetic development. As Sarah Gilead comments, "the Victorians sought in literature, especially in narrative, both a diagnostic tool and a cure for social, cultural, and psychical malaises; sought a means of dramatizing a wide variety of dearths, contradictions, and inadequacies characteristic of the 'age of transition,' as well as a format for reimagining traditional culture-generating myths" (302). Sara and her creator, reimagining Cinderella and Marie-Antoinette and significantly altering their plots, offer a non-teleological and nurturing model for female development--part of a "culture-generating myth" of maternal nature.

What Sara Crewe teaches she also learns: the power of sympathetic identification. Elizabeth Keyser suggests that "it is not Sara's transformation of the attic that is magical any more than the ensuing transformation performed by Ram Dass. The real magic is the way in which Sara's revelation of her misery transforms the selfish, parasitic Ermengarde into someone who is capable of supposing--supposing in the sense of empathizing with another human being" (239-40). But it is not only Ermengarde who learns this lesson; it is, as Keyser further notes, Sara herself. ²⁷ Although Sara seems to change little in her story, requiring, like Cinderella, simple discovery rather than development, she does indeed grow: from a "princess," who imagines her storytelling as "scattering largess to the populace," to one who receives material largess from others, and finally to the moral being who, surrounded by the children of the "Large Family," tells her own story and ends it with the more utilitarian **[End Page 177]** largess of food for poor children (52). Sara's feeding program for poor children, set up in a local bakery, neatly provides the bread for the poor which Marie Antoinette is so famously imagined as denying them. ²⁸ Nurturing poor children with food and the wealthier children of the Large Family with her imaginative tales, Sara exercises a maternal function without the intermediate steps of courtship and marriage which so often occupy center stage in the Cinderella story. ²⁹ *A Little Princess* thus offers a model of female development that differs significantly from its predecessors. Sara accomplishes much, if not all, of her redemption on her own; she is not "rescued" from cinders into marriage, nor does she suffer the fate of the most famous Bastille prisoners. She eludes both marriage and death, the two most common endings for Victorian heroines. As a narrator herself, as well as a heroine, she has the power to reshape her destiny and to identify imaginatively with others, enriching their lives as well.

Some Conclusions

"Once upon a time there was a princess." Night after night, my father told me stories that began with those words, or some like them. The stories went on to describe the various suitors to the princess's hand, and the impossible tasks they were set; I was told to "dream" the endings, which were always the same: one suitor succeeded (usually the youngest and poorest one), and he and the princess got married and lived happily ever after. Thinking back, it seems to me that implicitly *I* was always that princess--indeed, I used to joke with my sister that obviously our father preferred me because I got princess stories and, six years later, hers were about bunnies.³⁰ Clearly, princesses were for a time my role models. As we've seen, stories and princesses such as the ones my father invented permeate our cultural memory; the famous ones, Cinderella and Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and their sisters, live on in multiple versions--plays, stories, movies, videos. When my daughter was three, she already knew what the best things were for a girl to be: she announced at Hallowe'en that she would go as a "princess-fairy-angel-bride." "Gender girl," we laughingly called her; but I worried, too, that she'd imbibed these messages so early. But "gender girl," like my childhood self, always has a story to tell before the role is fixed. No princess exists without her story; some of the stories transcend the original princesses.

A Little Princess dramatizes the double value of story, of narrative, whether "realist" or "romantic": it is both pedagogical and nurturing. That is, story teaches--and it can teach morals as well as facts, behavior as well as content--and it nurtures; in this case, nurturing the motherless children [End Page 178] of Miss Minchin's Academy. The boarding school functions as both a realistic--if dated--context for the heroine's development and as a metaphor for the triumph of fact over fancy, recitation over story.³¹ Miss Minchin's school is a pedagogical prison, a Bastille of the imagination which Sara transforms both for herself and for her few friends through the operation of narrative. Significantly restored into "the Large Family" at the end of the novel, Sara continues as a story-teller and mother-figure to the younger children. Her tale-telling, romantic or realistic, false or true, has "redeemed" her out of the prison of Miss Minchin's and the isolation of the orphan into the bosom of family and the nurturing position of parent.

Sympathetic identification through narrative may only extend so far, however.³² Sara herself has the power--demonstrated particularly with the French master and with Ram Dass, the Indian servant--to connect across cultures as well as across classes, as she does with Becky. Her own somewhat ambiguous status--she is both French and English, both princess and pauper, both Eastern and Western--may assist her in that capacity. Yet the novel's border-crossing logic never quite extends to breaking down those borders.³³ Becky remains a servant even in Sara's restored status; the colonial enterprise that furnishes Sara's wealth is never called into question.³⁴ Sympathetic identification with "other" can nurture the imagination, spawning

the stories that alleviate misery, and, in turn, nurture the novel's children, but the transformative power of the stories functions only in one direction, still maintaining the hierarchies firmly in place.

So where are we left in the search for role models? Sara's creator, building her heroine on the model of Cinderella, significantly changes her story--one might, especially if one were trying to teach young girls about girlhood, say it's changed for the better. She draws on the unfortunate model of Marie Antoinette to do so; but in context, the deposed queen becomes an emblem not of oppression and hierarchy so much as of noble resignation, self-sacrificing maternity, and, especially, the necessity and value of a story-telling education. If sympathetic identification is a form of role modeling, Sara demonstrates and enacts it, displaying its possibilities as well as its limits. When today's Saras, or today's "gender girls," play at being princesses, we'd do well to ask not only, "who are their models?" but, "what are their stories?" They could do worse than Sara Crewe, both for what she demonstrates about being a little girl and what she demonstrates about how to personalize and adapt one's role models through story.

My reading here may be more feminist than Frances Hodgson Burnett or her earlier readers might have expected or wanted; nonetheless, by **[End Page 179]** focusing on the "variant forms of behavior" generated by role models, I think we can see how best to appropriate the fairy-tale tradition that so nurtures the narrative imagination. Far from limiting a reading of *A Little Princess*, seeing the cultural and historical strands on which it draws--Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, the school story, etc.--can open the text up for our own feminist revisions and for our continued re-readings. To find the Cinderella in Sara, that is, or the Marie Antoinette, is not necessarily to find the passive weepy heroine (or cruel queen) Yolen and other earlier feminist critics have feared, but to find a dynamically adaptable heroine whose chief function is to spur the imagination of another generation of readers.

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Notes

1. Of course many able scholars have taken up the question of appropriation and revision of models, especially of fairy tale and oral tradition models. Jack Zipes, in his study of the Little Red Riding Hood tradition, writes that "the changes made in the discourse about the fictional helpless girls dubbed Little Red Riding Hood--her discipline and punishment--indicate real shifts, conflicts, and ruptures in the Western civilizing process" (*The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 31). My focus here is on *how* changes are made in the discourse--how, that is, the "Western civilizing process" (and its agents, children's book authors) appropriate and reshape the surprisingly malleable models.

2. Keyser is particularly critical of Burnett's emphasis on romance over realism and sees a shift taking place in Burnett's career between the writing of "Sara Crewe" (which she reads as realistic) and *A Little Princess*, which "justif[ies] her own romantic imagination" (231-32).
3. Roles and role-playing resonate throughout the book. Dick Cate notes, for example, that Miss Minchin frequently plays the role of the kind but authoritative schoolmistress: a role Lavinia, for one, imitates. The fluidity and multiplicity of Sara's roles, he suggests, demonstrate her emotional maturity and flexibility. "The more closely we identify ourselves with a role, an act, the more easy does it become to imitate and mock us. For playing a role too closely enforces a kind of rigidity in us which leads to stereotype and ossification" (29). According to Barbara Hardy (whose work Cate draws on heavily in his essay), "[n]arratives and dramas are often *about* making up stories and playing roles. The novel is introverted in this sense, not because novels tend to be about novels, but because they tend to be about the larger narrative structure of consciousness, and the values and dangers involved in narrative modes of invention, dream, casual projection, and so on" (15).
4. Both the Grimm and Perrault versions circulated in England and throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. Yolen and Huang Mei's studies focus primarily on the Perrault versions; Yolen in particular argues that the "literary" variants of Cinderella popular in the nineteenth century owe more to Perrault (and the Victorian ideology of the feminine) than to the hardier Grimm heroine.
5. Huang Mei's *Transforming the Cinderella Dream* analyzes several of the "high art" or "adult" versions of Cinderella, from Richardson's *Pamela* through Burney's *Evelina* to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Jane Yolen's account of American Cinderellas parallels developments in England closely.
6. In this vein it is worth mentioning my current favorite nineteenth-century Cinderella, the illustrator George Cruikshank's version for his "Fairy Library," in which Cinderella becomes a temperance heroine. (Jack Zipes collects this version in his anthology, *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*.) A first edition of the tale, published in 1854, can be seen in the Hannah M. Adler collection at Skidmore College, and I thank Catherine Golden for alerting me to both the collection and the story.
7. Jane Yolen comments on the oddity that Cinderella should appear to American readers as a "rags to riches" story when it is really a tale of "riches recovered" (296). In this it resembles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, for example, more than *Great Expectations*; while both novels dramatize class mobility, Dickens's earlier fantasy, *Oliver Twist*, depicts a hero restored to his "rightful" (i.e., birth) position, while the later novel more directly tackles the question of real mobility (both up *and* down) that had begun to obsess Victorian readers.

8. While Yolen praises the Grimms' version of Cinderella as "hardy," Ruth Bottigheimer notes that "she remains conspicuously silent in the face of verbal abuse from her stepsisters and stepmother" (58). Indeed, as Bottigheimer further notes, successive versions of the tale by the Grimms reduced Cinderella's speaking parts considerably, thus reducing her status, even her "personhood" (74; see chap. 7, "Paradigms for Powerlessness"). As I shall argue, one of the most salient ways in which Sara Crewe positively revises the Cinderella model is through her speech, specifically her ability to tell stories.

9. Carol Dyhouse argues that "a society [like that of Victorian England] which defines maturity for men in terms of economic and occupational independence and actively discourages women from achieving economic independence *is* effectively condemning women to a permanently 'adolescent' state" (118). Clearly this refers primarily to middle- and upper-class women, for whom paid work was increasingly out of bounds during the Victorian period.

10. Huang Mei's reading nicely complicates some earlier approaches to the tale; finally, however, I find her over-optimistic in her claim that "the Cinderella myth is self-defeating as far as its patriarchal purpose is concerned. The kind of individualism it conveys is too energetic and aggressive to be contained by the ideological closure in which the happy marriage symbolizes a re-established patriarchal order" (26). Cinderella's--and many of her successors'--individualism hardly strikes one as aggressive, even in this reading.

11. Anne Isabella (Thackeray) Ritchie's version of "Cinderella" can be found in *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*, edited by Jack Zipes. Ritchie's retelling of the classic fairy tale relentlessly demystifies its magic while retaining its structure; the implicit critique seems to be of the sort of "magical thinking" that allows a young girl to be passively swept away rather than actively engineering her fate.

12. Most commentators agree that Carlyle's peroration to Marie Antoinette derives from Edmund Burke's comments in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

13. Kimberley Reynolds similarly sees Burnett's children's books as part of a trend in children's literature to "replace the ethos of confidence, mastery and independence based on masculine superiority with one based on class" (94).

14. In a shift from the Cinderella model, most of Sara's "tokens"--the doll Emily, for example, as well as the treasures from India--seem more connected to her father than to her mother's legacy. Her facility with French and interest in French history, however, do link her to her mother.

15. I am following Barbara Hardy's lead here in suggesting that the distinction between reality and fantasy is not necessarily

easy to draw: "The polarity between fantasy and reality is another instance of convenient fiction: we look back to go forward or to stay in a past-centered obsession. Like most works of fiction, personal history is made up of fantasy and realism, production and idling" (14).

[16.](#) Sally Mitchell's *The New Girl* is a gold mine of information on schools and school stories. See also Joan N. Burstyn.

[17.](#) See especially Burstyn for the history of girls' education in England. Thanks to Laura Green for pointing me to this and other sources on Victorian education.

[18.](#) Interestingly, France seems to substitute for India in Sara's stories. India is a source for her tales early on but is displaced by France and, in turn, displaces France in the final chapter. And this substitution is also a substitution of mother for father: France, her mother's birthplace, for India, site of her father's death. The most recent film version of *A Little Princess* (1995) excises all references to France and plays up the Indian connection.

[19.](#) I am indebted to the generous members of VICTORIA for alerting me to these nineteenth-century responses to Marie Antoinette.

[20.](#) First Becky the maid and later Boris the Russian boarhound serve to demonstrate this sort of "freedom in loyalty."

[21.](#) Her status as orphan is of course central to the novel's plot; it is also subtly underscored in her naming of the rat Melchisedec, whose Biblical namesake is famously "without father, without mother, without descent" (Hebrews 7:3).

[22.](#) Mitchell qualifies this description somewhat: "The public school (in fiction and perhaps in actuality) was a female world that contained a variety of 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles. Pseudofamilies were established: older girls were assigned a new girl as 'child'" (88). Vicinus seems to read the same evidence oppositely: "Repeatedly we find that girls' boarding schools claimed to encourage both family ties and familylike behavior, and yet they were in actuality encouraging codes and behavior antithetical to the traditional family" (164). At issue here seems to be the definition of "family," a vexed issue in historical and literary investigations of the period. What seems clear, in either case, is that the school in Burnett's tale makes little or no attempt to emulate the family but involves some cases of familial or quasi-familial attachment among the children.

[23.](#) Linda M. Shires notes that "the English . . . reading the Revolution in such a way as to further their own need for a centralized masculine government and a stable family life, fostered a view of the French royal family as ideal" (152).

[24.](#) See, for example, Sarah Ellis's *The Mothers of England*, as well as other conduct books of mid-century. Phyllis Bixler

connects Burnett's maternal ideology with earlier work by feminist writers in the nineteenth century:

Through crucial adaptations of her protagonists 'double' and her 'image of enclosure,' Burnett allies herself with feminist writers of the late-nineteenth century who, as Elaine Showalter has pointed out, 'made the maternal instinct the basis of their ideology' and saw in this 'female influence,' especially over males, 'a genuine source of power'" (100).

Bixler is speaking specifically of *The Secret Garden* here, but--except for the stress on influence over males--we can see a similar process in *A Little Princess*.

[25](#). Burstyn quotes Frederic Harrison, *Realities and Ideals*, 70.

[26](#). Mitzi Myers's work on Georgian children's literature notes a similar use of role modeling, and the transmission of cultural values from mother to daughter in juvenile literature. In Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, Myers points out, Wollstonecraft's character Mason explicitly embraces a role model based pedagogy: "'To attain any thing great, a model must be held up to our understanding' (126)" (48). Lynne Vallone's use of Myers's work alerted me to its relevance for this piece.

[27](#). I am obviously indebted to Keyser's reading of the novel in developing my own. Her focus, however, on Burnett's ambivalent relationship to her talent and her imagination, differs considerably from my own emphasis on pedagogy and development through role-modeling.

[28](#). Roxanne Eberle pointed out this nicely ironic revision of Marie Antoinette's popular image.

[29](#). Claudia Nelson, in a study of turn-of-the-century fantasy, notes that many such tales transform female sexuality into maternity; the transformation of Sara into a motherly friend, rather than a bride as in the Cinderella story, seems to follow this pattern ("Fantasies de Siècle," 94). Nelson concludes her essay by arguing that:

The possibility that not biology but parenting may determine the gender roles of the new generation makes motherhood still more important; not only are maternal self-sacrifice, purity, and influence goals for both male and female characters in these fantasies, but misused maternal power can be the root of all evil (103).

Miss Minchin certainly comes to mind in this context, as well as Sara's transformation of Cinderella and Marie Antoinette into positive, and maternal, figures.

[30](#). The bunnies and the princesses were actually, I think, remarkably similar--and both of us were set the same task of

"dreaming" an ending. Did my father anticipate the research on narrative and moral development? And why can't I remember anything about the stories he told my brothers?

[31](#). While the novel implicitly critiques the oppressive boarding school, as portrayed by Miss Minchin's, such a critique was already an anachronism by the time of the novella's, not to mention the novel's, publication. Sally Mitchell notes that "by the end of [the nineteenth century] less than a quarter of all girls between twelve and eighteen attended any sort of school" (74); of those, perhaps seventy per cent were in private boarding schools (Dyhouse, 50). But, according to Mitchell, the small private school like Miss Minchin's had passed from the scene of girls' fiction, for the most part, by the time of the novel's publication. It may thus have been more accurate to contemporary reality than to fictional tastes of the time.

[32](#). Alan Richardson suggests, in rather a different context, some of the dangers of sympathetic identification. Richardson focuses on associationist psychology as a central component in the Romantics' fascination with sibling incest: "if childhood associations were quickened by passion . . . the sympathetic bond . . . would approach the Romantic ideal of perfect sympathy in love" (741). This sympathy is finally dangerous to the sister, however, who, rather than sharing equally in a partnership, becomes absorbed into, and often destroyed by, the Romantic poet-hero. Thus while the ideal of sibling sympathy valorizes the sister as a perfect complement, she finally succumbs to the greater ego of the brother and is consumed. I seem here to be talking about a similar construct but across nation/class boundaries rather than gender.

[33](#). Ruth Feingold's work in progress on *A Little Princess* promises to deal with these borders, and Sara's crossings, more fully than I can here (personal correspondence).

[34](#). Deirdre David suggests that "just as the Indian diamond 'invades' England in *The Moonstone*, the thematic material of empire may be said to make a literary invasion of the English novel during the nineteenth century, thereby revealing the imperialist foundation of Britain's domestic wealth during that extended period of economic growth" (126). Certainly *A Little Princess* demonstrates this truth, but it is difficult to find even a veiled critique of the practice in this novel.

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