

**GOD BLESS THE CHILD: MODELS FOR TEACHING VIRTUE IN
THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

THESIS

**Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University–San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements**

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Hillary S. Reyes, B.A.

**San Marcos, Texas
August 2009**

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2009

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and sister. Some of my first memories are of my mother, Sherry, reading to my sister and me. I would beg her to read *The Gunniwolf* to us because the character of the wolf was the only one she would use a voice for. My mother instilled the love of reading and the value of obtaining an education in me at an extremely young age; I thank her for that.

Once my sister, Hayley, was old enough to read for herself, she would read to me every night. I have pictures of us laying in bed, in matching pajamas, my head on her shoulder, as she read me to sleep. I would beg her to read *Me Too!* because she would let me read the little sister's part in the book. She was always kind when reading to me, and she would gently remind me that it was time for my line when I was not paying attention to the story.

My mother, my sister, and I continue to hold children's literature close to our hearts. We have been known to buy each other children's books that express the sentiment we are trying to convey. Without my mother and my sister, I would not love reading as much as I do; I would not have chosen the career path that I did; and I would not be who I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people that I feel I need to thank for helping me accomplish the daunting task of completing Graduate School and this thesis. First, I'd like to thank Dr. Caroline Jones for helping me wade through the numerous drafts of this thesis. There were times when I felt that I might not be cut out to write an entire thesis, but Dr. Jones was always supportive and encouraging. I would like to thank her for that.

Second, I'd like to say thank you to Dr. Robert Tally and Dr. Teya Rosenberg. During my writing process the two of them were strong in their comments, and it really helped push me to the finish line. Also, during my time as a Graduate Student at Texas State University-San Marcos, their classes were two that grabbed my attention, and both of their teaching styles captivated me.

Lastly, I'd like to thank all of the people who have helped me with my education, whether it was emotionally or financially: my mother, my sister, my father, my grammie, my Uncle-Dee, The Terry Foundation, and Texas State University-San Marcos.

This manuscript was submitted on June 17th, 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

Plato described education as “a training which produces a keen desire to become a perfect citizen . . . we should want to mark off this sort of training from others and reserve the title ‘education’ for it alone” (Plato 73). He believed that education in virtue, or goodness, is the only education that deserves the name.

Because many scholars disagree on exact dates, the Golden Age of children’s literature is a hard era to pin down. This is mainly due to the fact that “Golden Ages can only be identified in retrospect, when they can be seen to have finished. And one can hardly be expected to give precise dates for their termination” (Carpenter 210). In children’s literature, the Golden Age, much like any era, did not end abruptly; it slowly grew into something else. Humphrey Carpenter’s discussion of the Golden Age centers on the years 1860-1930 while Jerry Griswold’s discussion is set in 1866-1914. With these dates in mind, I feel confident in studying texts between the late 1800s and early 1900s when discussing this era of the Golden Age. I posit that during the Golden Age three basic methods of teaching virtue were being engaged: the virtuous model, the

performance virtue model, and the disregard of virtue model. I will discuss these models in more depth later in this thesis.

Regardless of an exact time-line, the Golden Age is important partly because during this era the idea of a specific literature for children was more popular than ever, and there was easy access to books for middle and upper class families. In fact, “publishers could count on most of their sales (80 to 90 percent estimate) going to the newly established children’s rooms in public libraries” (Lundin 48).

The field of children’s literature was not yet an academic field, but the market force behind children’s literature was taking shape. The demand for books directed solely at the child reader was higher than ever before and publishing houses were answering that demand:

The first twenty years of the [twentieth] century had seen a tremendous development in the business of publishing for children. It was a period of expansion, during which the great ‘children’s houses’ established their reputations and many of the larger firms formed separate children’s departments for the first time. (Eyre 21)

In order to keep up with the demand for children’s books, the publishing companies had to make changes in the way they did business; this included creating subsidiary departments and new branches of their companies: “The expansion of the market for children’s books was accompanied by a discovery that children were not all of one pattern . . .

but that age, sex, and interests may vary,” so the publishing companies also began to branch out with the type of books they published for the child reader (M. Thwaite 97). These genres included “books for older boys, books for girls, and books for younger children” (M. Thwaite 97).

Another key aspect of the Golden Age was the caliber of books for children that were being produced. The canon of literature has continuously changed; important texts in one area lose significance in another. However, this does not seem to hold true for the canon of children’s literature: “While canon wars have waged in the humanities, the family tree of children’s classics has remained relatively unshaken amid the storms about” (Lundin xvii). Many college classes that teach children’s literature will include texts from the Golden Age: “[It] was a remarkable time. It was an era when ‘the majors wrote for minors’; when the very best authors on both sides of the Atlantic, writers with worldwide reputations, addressed themselves to juveniles” (Griswold viii). The writing of books for child readers had never been so esteemed before:

With the Romantics’ ‘discovery’ of the child, we [were] confronted with something new: the phenomenon of major literary figures expressing their most profound thoughts through the image of the child . . . Within a few decades, the child emerged from cultural diminution to become the cultural icon of imaginative literature and philosophical speculation. (Lundin 5)

The Golden Age was also remarkable because of the number of texts authors were able to produce that have endured over time and still make the lists of all-time favorite books: “These are also books that touch us as young readers in ways that few books encountered later in life do” (Jacobson 1). The way that the subconscious is formed and changed by the books we read in childhood is remarkable: “A book read and loved as a child can influence one’s perceptions of life, one’s values, and even one’s preferences in literature as an adult,” and a large number of the children’s books of the Golden Age continue to be read by children and re-read by present day adults (Hendrickson 141).

Another remarkable aspect of the Golden Age is the intertextuality of virtue and morals that occurs in the children’s classics of that time period. The moral education of children was central to children’s literature prior to the Golden Age, and that goal bled into works of the Golden Age as well: “The chief target of fictional instruction was the moral character of the young; every work of fiction written for children before 1860 was dedicated to the moral education of its readers” (MacLeod, *Moral Tale* 24). Therefore, most children’s novels of the Golden Age continued to have underlying themes of teaching children good morals and virtues. However, it was the changing way that the authors were teaching those lessons that helped to propel the Golden Age into the spotlight: “Until the middle of the nineteenth century there was plenty of material for the sheer entertainment of children, and plenty

that gave them moral instruction, but the two scarcely ever met between one set of covers” (Carpenter 2). This was because the typical writer during the Enlightenment period perceived a child as “simply a miniature adult, a chrysalis from which a fully rational and moral being would duly emerge” (Carpenter 7). However, during the Golden Age something new began to happen: “From the largely didactic literature of the early years there developed the adventure story, fantasy, humour, [and] humanized animals” (Marshall 33). Many new authors who emerged during the Golden Age were concerned with captivating their young readers:

They still larded their narratives plentifully with moral advice – in this respect, they had not really moved so very far from their predecessors . . . - but they buried their didacticism a bit deeper in adventurous tales . . . and stories of poor children rising meteorically in the world. (MacLeod, *Moral Tale* 118)

The shift from a merely didactic moral lesson to an entertaining story with underlying lessons of virtue is what connects many texts from the Golden Age and what helped those texts speak to many audiences and become best sellers.

While virtues have been, and continue to be, taught through children’s literature, the virtues that are valued are different in every society. They have changed since the writers of the Golden Age were reaching out to the youth of the late 1800s, but, for the purpose of this

thesis, I focus on the virtues of empathy, obedience, and helpfulness because they are evident in many of the texts I discuss and have endured the test of time to stay relevant and valuable in today's society.

Since the inception of children's literature, or literature directed at children, one thing has remained constant: the intent to teach some lesson to the child reader. In achieving the goal of teaching the child reader how to lead a moral and virtuous life, three basic methods emerged: the virtuous model, the performance virtue model, and the disregard of virtue model. The three models have distinct characteristics, but they also sometimes overlap. I first became interested in the virtuous model and performance virtue model when I tried to compare Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) to Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* (1875). I came across Claudia Mills's 2006 article "The Canary and the Nightingale" which focuses on the differences between innate virtue and the performance of virtue through the characters of Phebe and Rose in *Eight Cousins* and *Rose in Bloom*. Mills discusses Rose as a model, but she does not give that model a name; this is what brought my attention to the topic. I want to develop the two models Mills introduces while also giving them names and solidifying them as note-worthy, reputable models of didactic children's literature. The virtuous model is a character in a text who possesses innate qualities that are representative of the kind of character which society considers good, qualities like "kindness, honesty, justice, mercy, and

courage” (O’Sullivan 640). A performance virtue model is a character in a text who knows what qualities are required to have good character, and therefore strives to act in a way that embodies those qualities, but who does not have those qualities innately. I also suggest a third model that is often used: disregard of virtue. This model is a character in a text who does not possess innate qualities of virtue and who does not strive to perform those qualities. This model is quite different from the others in that the main character is not a model for the child to emulate. Instead, the child readers are expected to glean the moral from the story themselves by viewing them as cautionary tales of what not to become. Whether it was through a virtuous model, performance virtue model, or disregard of virtue model, children’s literature of the Golden Age aimed to teach the readers how to be and/or act virtuously.

Each chapter of this thesis discusses one of the models for teaching virtue and focuses on how that model is realized through two Golden Age texts. The first chapter focuses on the virtuous model: a character that innately possesses many virtues and is able to model behaviors for the child readers that will help them to understand what those virtues are. Cedric, from Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and Heidi from Johanna Spyri’s *Heidi* (1880) are strong textual examples of the virtuous model. I chose Cedric because I believe him to be the quintessential virtuous model. The novel makes it clear that Cedric’s beauty and triumph all stem from his innate virtue. I also

chose to look at Heidi because she is an example of an innately virtuous character that originated from another part of the world during the same time period. The use of her story helps to emphasize the idea that the didactic models of virtue were not simply an English phenomenon of the Golden Age, but that the models spoke to many peoples and cultures of the era.

The second chapter focuses on the performance virtue model: a character who does not innately possess virtuous qualities, but who strives to act in a virtuous manner regardless of that deficit. Rose, in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* (1875) and Anne, from L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) are strong textual examples of the performance virtue model. One of the reasons Rose and Anne are so interesting is their knowledge of their performance virtue. They both know that they lack innate virtue, but strive to at least be perceived as virtuous. The texts discussed in this chapter also show that the model was a persistent one that spanned over thirty years between the two novels.

The third chapter focuses on the disregard of virtue model: a character that neither possesses innate virtue nor strives to act in a virtuous manner. Laura, from Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) and Peter from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) are strong textual examples of the disregard of virtue model. These texts are interesting because they, again, demonstrate a persistent model that

lasted at least forty years, which helps to show its usefulness as a model while also presenting the complication of the foil of the virtuous character. Laura in particular is an interesting character to study because she has Lizzie, her sister, to enhance the discussion. Lizzie's role is just as large as Laura's in *Goblin Market*, but Peter's sisters play a much smaller role than Peter himself in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. The fact that Laura shares the spotlight with Lizzie while Peter's sisters are only present in the beginning and end of the text points to the difference in the severity of each character's disregard of virtue. Laura's behavior leads to a much more serious situation in which she is very close to death, while Peter's behavior leads to an adventure that only hints at a life or death outcome. However, the role of the foil characters is important in both texts because they provide a barometer of virtue for the reader to gauge the behavior of Laura and Peter against. Without those foils, the disregard of virtue model would not be highlighted.

The intention of this thesis is to assert that, no matter the model used to present the information, a number of texts written during the Golden Age can be viewed as instructional texts for an education in virtue. Not all texts from the Golden Age fit into one of the three categories discussed here, but the foundation will be set to look for the various models used to impart virtue to the children of the time period. It is important to not only notice these models but also to name and study them because the models do not exist only within the pages of the

texts I discuss; they exist in many other Golden Age texts and extend into children's literature of other time periods. By acknowledging these models, and naming them as legitimate patterns within the texts of the Golden Age, perhaps more patterns can begin to emerge. While I confine my discussion to the pattern of models of virtue, other children's literature scholars may find inspiration within the pages of this thesis for further development with other patterns; they may even begin to study the use of models of virtue in contemporary children's literature. These three models were utilized for over fifty years when some of the bestselling books were aimed at children; perhaps they helped authors bridge the gap between the child and adult reader and sell to both audiences, or maybe it says something more about the importance of religious education and virtue of the time period. It is through the study of patterns that one discovers and begins to understand the ideology and culture of a time period. I hope to shed some light on one of those patterns because contemporary children's literature may be reformulating at least some of these models of teaching virtue. Once again, some of the best-selling books are aimed at children, and, once again, we see virtue thematically employed within them. They have changed over time, as society has changed, but they are still pervasive in modern children's literature.

CHAPTER I: THE MODEL OF VIRTUE

The virtuous model in a literary work is a character who possesses innate qualities that are representative of the kind of character or moral standing that his or her society considers good. The virtuous model, technically, cannot be taught because innate virtue cannot be taught. However, the virtuous model is still didactic because the main character can represent an ideal to which the child reader can aspire. In every model, the child reader has to be an active learner during the reading of the text. The context of the virtuous model has changed over the years as the qualities that a given society deems good have changed and evolved. As those qualities changed, so did the skeleton of the model; the innately virtuous character who shows the reader how to behave has not endured in contemporary children's literature. In fact, the model did not even persist through to the twentieth century. Frances Hodgson Burnett, for example, utilized the virtuous model in *Fauntleroy*, but by the time she published *The Secret Garden* in 1911, she had abandoned the virtuous model for the more realistic performance virtue model. Perhaps she recognized a shift in her audience or perhaps something had

changed in her own life. For whatever reason, the virtuous model would not persevere.

The Golden Age of children's literature produced many novels that used the virtuous model to instruct children on how to lead a moral life, and the virtuous model child character is always unaware of his or her innate virtue. Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* "was an immediate success when published in New York and London in 1886; reprinted before publication, it was among the year's best-sellers" (Wilson 235). But, its popularity would not continue for long as evidenced by "the resistance to the velvet suit . . . [by] they turn of the twentieth century" (Wilson 255). The velvet Fauntleroy suit was prevalent among young boys at the height of the novel's popularity, but it too would become obsolete by the end of the Golden Age.

Little Lord Fauntleroy tells the story of Cedric Errol who is seven years old, blonde, extremely handsome, and never has a moment of self-doubt in his own virtue or in the virtue of those around him. There are no scenes that call into question his motives or his moral quality. The story begins with Cedric living in Brooklyn with his mother, to whom he refers as Dearest. His father is dead, and his mother works hard to support both herself and her child. Cedric is visited one day by a man named Havisham who tells Cedric that he has a grandfather who is an Earl, and the Earl would like for Cedric to come live with him. The reader finds out that Dearest knew her late husband was the son of an

Earl, but that he was disowned when he married an American: the Earl had never met his grandson Cedric. Havisham tells Dearest that the other sons of the Earl have died and that Cedric is the rightful heir and has been given the title Lord Fauntleroy. Cedric and his mother move to England where Cedric moves into the estate of the Earl of Dorincourt, while Dearest is given a house neighboring the property. While the rest of the population is aware that the Earl is not a nice man, Cedric believes in the goodness of all people. He does not see the hateful looks the countrymen give his grandfather, and he believes that everyone loves the Earl. Because of Cedric's good heart, and his constant praise of his grandfather, the Earl begins to soften. He even begins to believe that "to see each of his ugly, selfish motives changed into a good and generous one by the simplicity of a child was a singular experience" that he greatly enjoys (Burnett 123). When Cedric compliments his grandfather, it makes the grandfather want to live up to the compliment. The novel ends with the family living together in Dorincourt.

In *Fauntleroy*, Cedric acts as an exemplar of virtue to be emulated. He has innate qualities that set him apart from other children: both the beauty he possesses and the ability to see goodness in every person and every situation: "His beauty was something unusual . . . he held his childish head up, and carried himself with quite a brave little air; . . . he looked as if he had never feared or doubted anything in his life," and he has not (Burnett 29). He has not even been called to doubt his own

virtue because he has never realized he has it. There are numerous occasions when other characters in the novel comment on his virtue and his ability to bring out the good in everybody. The townsmen speak of Fauntleroy in a kind manner:

they would go home and tell their wives about him, and the women would tell each other, and so it came about that almost everyone talked of, or knew some story of, little Lord Fauntleroy; and gradually almost everyone knew that the 'wicked Earl' had found something he cared for at last – something which had touched and even warmed his hard, bitter old heart. (Burnett 165)

Child readers may surmise that in order to be happy, and simultaneously powerful and admired, one must be virtuous. This lesson is offered to the child not only through Cedric's actions, but also through the juxtaposition of Cedric with his grandfather, the Earl of Dorincourt, who seems to possess no virtue in the beginning, but slowly comes to understand what virtue is and how to perform in a way that would be construed as virtuous. The Earl of Dorincourt actually becomes a performance virtue model after being taught virtue through Cedric's actions, which is essentially what the child reader is being asked to do.

From the beginning of the novel, Cedric is described as having great concern and kindness for others. The first incident where the

reader sees Cedric's concern for others is in a simple foot race. Cedric has won when he immediately turns to the other boy to console him for the loss. The narrator immediately points out that "Ceddie Errol had a way of making people feel comfortable. Even in the first flush of his triumphs, he remembered that the person who was beaten might not feel so gay as he did, and might like to think that he *might* have been the winner under different circumstances" (Burnett 32). Burnett is able to point out that Cedric feels empathy for people around him. Many child readers might expect Cedric to boast of his accomplishment in the win, or not think about it at all. However, Cedric consciously worries about the loser of the race. The qualities of sympathy and empathy are important to a virtuous character. In order to represent goodness, the character has to care about the surrounding characters. Cedric cares about the feelings of the child he raced against enough to console him, he is courteous in his consolation and careful to tell the other child that he might have won if circumstances had been different, and his peacemaking virtue comes out through that consolation. These virtues, caring, courtesy, and peacemaking, are important for Cedric to possess because he will one day be named Earl of Dorincourt in his Grandfather's place. The lives of the townspeople have been bettered since Cedric arrived, and as long as he continues to possess his innate qualities of virtue, instead of becoming cruel and selfish as his Grandfather is, then he warrants the power and authority that he will

inherit. As Earl, Cedric will be in charge of the local economy, and as someone who has such power over other people's lives, he should act in a way that does not abuse that power.

Another incident in which Cedric's innate virtue is displayed is in Cedric's use of the money sent from the Earl. When Mr. Havisham explains to Cedric that the Earl has sent him a great deal of money to do with whatever he wishes, Cedric's immediate response is to help others. He gives money and gifts to everyone from the applecart lady to his dear friend Mr. Hobbs. The grandfather is confused and a bit irritated by Cedric's actions when he learns of them, but he does not let Cedric know. This is the first act of Cedric's virtue that the Earl is made aware of, even though he does not witness it first-hand. It is also the point when the reader realizes that Cedric will make a wonderful Little Lord Fauntleroy and future Earl of Dorincourt. He is a born humanitarian: "While Cedric acquires both title and wealth in the course of the book, it is a central point that he does not change, does not *need* to change to fit his new position. He is what he is," and he is virtuous (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 82). Cedric doesn't understand selfishness; it is almost as if he is unable to recognize that such a quality exists. He understands that there are others who have even less than he does. He never feels bad for himself or jealous of those who have more wealth than he does. Cedric spends his energy thinking about how he can help those less fortunate than he. His empathy is shown by his choice of what to do

with the money. He feels badly for the applecart woman and Dick the shoe-shiner because they are not as well off as he is. He displays helpfulness through his purchases of a wrap for the applecart woman so that she can keep warm and the buyout of Dick's partner so that he can earn a better living. When he approaches Dick to offer him the money, "Lord Fauntleroy's manner of announcing the object of his visit was very simple and unceremonious" (Burnett 49). Cedric simply informs Dick that his Grandfather is an Earl and that "he sent me a lot of money by Mr. Havisham, and I've brought some to you to buy Jake out" (Burnett 50). Cedric's many virtues, including respect and loyalty, are shown through the people he chooses to buy gifts for (his friends) and the presentation of the gifts that is done without any superiority.

A third incident is the first one that occurs under the eyes of the Earl of Dorincourt. Mr. Mordaunt, the parish minister, has come to the estate to ask that Mr. Higgins, a man who has been ill and down-on-his-luck, be allowed more time to pay his bills so that Mr. Newick would not evict him. Mr. Mordaunt dreads asking the Earl for this consideration because of his previous experiences in similar situations; however, it was the only way to save Mr. Higgins and his family from the streets. The Earl, on a whim, asks Cedric what he would do. When Cedric replies that he would let Mr. Higgins stay and help him with his children, the Earl decides to let him do just that. He instructs Cedric to write a letter telling Newick to allow Higgins to stay and that the letter was to be from

him, Little Lord Fauntleroy. Cedric is all too happy to participate in helping Higgins and “when Mr. Mordaunt went away he took the letter with him, and he took something else with him also – namely, a pleasanter feeling and a more hopeful one than he had ever carried home with him down that avenue on any previous visit he had made at Dorincourt Castle” (Burnett 121). Cedric makes it possible for Mr. Higgins to remain in his home. Mr. Mordaunt knows it, the Earl knows it, the reader knows it; however, Cedric does not know it. It never occurs to him that his grandfather would have let Mr. Higgins and his family be put out. The fact that Cedric instinctively responds to Mr. Higgins’ situation in the same way that Mr. Mordaunt would only helps prove that Cedric is innately virtuous because Mr. Mordaunt, as the parish minister, is the community’s model of virtue: “Little Lord Fauntleroy is different from others because of his wide-eyed optimism, his ignorance of evil, and his naïve belief that, for example, his conniving grandfather is a paragon of virtue” (Griswold 18). To Cedric, everyone around him understands virtue in the same way he does. His ability to believe that all people are kind-hearted leads to others wanting to live up to that belief. Cedric’s caring and sense of fairness are apparent through his desire to help Mr. Higgins keep his home because Higgins is a hard worker. Cedric is worried about creating a letter that is official enough to come out of the Earl’s office. He begins writing cautiously and “it was rather a slow process, but he gave his whole soul to it . . . [he wrote] Dear

mr Newik if you pleas mr higgins is not to be inturfeared with for the present and oblige Yours rispecferly Fauntleroy” (Burnett 120). Once the letter is complete, he hands it to his Grandfather and asks about its spelling. When he learns that some of the spelling is incorrect, he proclaims, “I ought to have asked . . . It’s always safest. I’ll write it over again.’ And write it over again he did” (Burnett 121).

These three incidents in which Cedric is a virtuous model are just the beginning. He continues to improve life at Dorincourt castle: through his innate virtue, Cedric:

redeems the selfish, embittered old earl, improves life for the tenants of the estate, and eventually heals the breach between his widowed mother and his aristocratic grandfather. All this he does quite unconsciously, simply by acting in accord with his nature. (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 80)

While the narrator tells the reader that Cedric has no unkindness in him, s/he is also quick to point out the shortcomings of his grandfather: “The Earl is portrayed as entirely bereft of the relational qualities exemplified by Cedric and his parents. Vicious, savage, ill-tempered, and violent, he has neglected his wife as well as his children; the deaths of all of them are more or less directly attributed to his self-enclosed sterility” (Richardson 12). Burnett makes sure the reader knows what a terrible man the Earl was before Cedric arrived: “he had

been selfish and self-indulgent, and arrogant and passionate; he had cared so much for the Earl of Dorincourt and his pleasures that there had been no time for him to think of other people . . . [and] He had a cruel tongue and a bitter nature” (Burnett 46). It is also clear that through Cedric’s model of innate virtue, the grandfather is redeemed and begins to exemplify some of those characteristics himself. In fact, after the Earl hears from Cedric about a group of run-down cottages in the town, he realizes that:

he actually had learned to be fond enough of that small boy . . . that he himself would prefer to be guilty of an amiable action now and then. And so . . . he sent for Newick . . . and it was decided that the wretched hovels should be pulled down and new houses should be built. (Burnett 163)

For “Fauntleroy can not only brighten rooms, he can transform character, and even social systems” (Wilson 240). Through his inborn virtue and sense of morality, Cedric is able to change the heart of an old man.

The foil Burnett presents for Cedric in the character of the Earl is a necessary one. If the readers were presented with the story of Cedric in Brooklyn leading up the point of moving to England, they would become bored because there is no purpose in reading about a virtuous boy and the wonderful life he leads. There has to be an example of an awful person who is taught something by the virtuous model to show the effect

that leading a virtuous life can have. The reader is asked to accept that if one is virtuous he can do anything, and it doesn't stop with *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Many authors of the Golden Age "quite evidently hoped to encourage real children to become models of moral behavior for others in their own lives" (MacLeod, *Moral Tale* 48). A model was followed for this as well:

In the typical situation, a child (full of innocence, vitality, and love) encountered a middle-aged or old person who was in bad shape (lonely, depressed, grouchy). The disagreeable grownup had given up on people, often because of a death or disappointment. But the child's sweet and affectionate character, all by itself, melted the icy heart and turned the town grump into a Santa Claus. (O'Keefe 103-104)

The virtuous model can be seen in stories throughout the Golden Age, and books using the model evidently did well at market, because new authors who followed the same formula continued to emerge.

The virtuous model can be seen around the world and into Germany through the main character in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. The tale of *Heidi* begins when the child is five years old. Her aunt is taking Heidi to live with her grandfather, a man everyone refers to as the Alm-Uncle because he lives his life as a hermit on the mountaintop. One of the townspeople describes the Alm-Uncle by saying that when he does come into town "he comes down with his thick staff, every one keeps out of his

way and is afraid of him. With his heavy gray eyebrows and his tremendous beard he looks like a heathen and a savage, and people are glad enough not to meet him alone” (Spyri 5). The Alm-Uncle sounds like a terrifying man, but Heidi, in her innate virtue and innocence, is not scared by his appearance. Her grandfather accepts Heidi into his home, and provides her with food and shelter. Heidi soon grows to love it on the mountain. She quickly befriends Peter, the local goatherd, and spends most days roaming the mountain with the goats. Her grandfather refuses to send her to school because he has shunned the outside world since the outside world turned its back on him. Then, when Heidi is eight years old, her aunt returns to take her to Frankfurt. Heidi is dragged from her mountain hut and sent to live in Frankfurt as a companion to an invalid named Klara. The home of Klara Sesemann is a wealthy one. Heidi is treated to much more lavish accommodations than she has ever known, and she has access to a larger array of foods than on the mountain; however, she does not fare well. Heidi is extremely homesick the entire time she is in Frankfurt – despite the fact that she dearly loves her companion, Klara. After a while, her homesickness begins to manifest itself in both a deteriorating body and in sleepwalking. Herr Sesemann is told by the family doctor that he should send Heidi home at once so that she may regain her health, so she is returned to the mountain the next day. Heidi returns to her grandfather and to the family of Peter the goatherd. Eventually, the doctor comes to visit Heidi,

and the next year he returns with Herr Sesemann and Klara. The mountain air and goat's milk prove good medicine for Klara's condition, and by the time she leaves the mountain she is out of her wheelchair and walking. Heidi's innate virtue transforms her grandfather from a hermit into a beloved townsman, awakens the doctor's frozen heart after the death of his daughter, and cures an invalid.

Heidi's first outward sign of innate virtue is in her greeting to her grandfather: "She went straight to the old man, held out her hand to him, and said: - 'How do you do, grandfather?'" (Spyri 12). Her innocence allows her to be undisturbed by the gruff demeanor and formidable appearance of the Alm-Uncle, and she walks straight up to him for introductions. The fact that she is not afraid of him, and that she knows nothing of his past, makes her grandfather like Heidi immediately. The simple exchange of a handshake between Heidi and her grandfather displays Heidi's open-heartedness and respect.

A second outward sign of Heidi's virtue occurs in her first excursion with Peter and his herd of goats. During lunch on the mountain, Heidi gives Peter more than half of her lunch and says, "You may have that. I have enough" (Spyri 27). There is nothing entirely special about this passage, but it lets the reader know that Heidi is helpful. Peter is shocked at the gesture because he is from a poor family, and, therefore, he has always had to fight for his fair share, but Heidi shares freely. Her innate virtues of empathy and open-heartedness are

displayed through that sharing because, although it is a fairly mundane act, learning to share is a difficult concept for many children to master. Heidi lives her life as if the true value in it comes from relationships and seeing beauty in the natural world.

A third sign of Heidi's virtue comes during her first visit to Peter's grandmother. The grandmother is blind, but Heidi, at only five years old, does not understand this, and when she is finally made to understand she shows great distress. This reaction on Heidi's part displays the innate virtue of empathy. Heidi even tries to lead the grandmother out into the daylight because "she was beginning to be distressed because it did not seem light anywhere to the old dame" (Spyri 40). Once Heidi has come to understand that the lady cannot, and never will be able to, see, she decides to visit the grandmother often to brighten her day, and it works: "After many long years a joy had come into the blind grandmother's dreary life, and her days were no more long and dark; for now she always had something pleasant to anticipate" (Spyri 45). Heidi's distress upon learning of the grandmother's blindness shows her empathy and caring, while her decision to visit often further displays her helpfulness and loyalty because she wants to help the grandmother she has come to care about.

After Heidi is taken to live in Frankfurt, the one thing that she takes solace in is knowing that she can bring back white bread for the grandmother so that she does not have to eat hard bread anymore.

When she finally does return to the mountain, she brings the white rolls with her, another instance of Heidi's virtue. Brigitte, Peter's mother, asks Heidi to put on the beautiful hat that she brought with her, but Heidi refuses. She says, "You can have it; I don't need it any longer, I still have my own" (Spyri 131). This passage demonstrates that Heidi has not been corrupted by the outside world, as her grandfather had feared she would be. Heidi still has the innate virtue of humility instead of vanity, as well as those of fairness and respect. She gives the hat to Brigitte because Brigitte expresses a fondness for it, and her decision to wear her old straw hat is made out of respect for her grandfather, who she knows doesn't like fancy hats because, to him, they symbolize the trappings of city life. Heidi values the simple things in life, as her grandfather does. She understands the practical, and she respects her grandfather for the man he is and the way-of-life that made him who he is.

I stated earlier that the way that the subconscious is formed and changed by the books we read in childhood is remarkable. This holds true for *Heidi* as well. Linnea Hendrickson, a prominent children's scholar, recognizes the impact of the innate virtue present in *Heidi*. She claims that "*Heidi*, as dated, sentimental, flawed, and didactic as it may be, has, nevertheless, provided a viable model for my own life" (Hendrickson 146). She even asks herself if "the window in Heidi's loft, and the lack of a view from the windows in Frankfurt is the reason I have

always chosen to live, when I have had the choice, in rooms full of windows that let in the light and views of trees and flowers?”

(Hendrickson 142). Hendrickson believes that her own preferences may have been formed as a subconscious reaction to her love of *Heidi*. She also concedes that it was “not only *Heidi*’s images but its values [that] influenced me” (Hendrickson 144). The power of a book read as a child cannot be ignored, and the power of an innately virtuous character to change and reform others is not confined within the pages of the book. Cedric is able to transform the Earl in *Fauntleroy* and Heidi is able to transform the Alm-Uncle in *Heidi*, but they are both also able to transform the reader in a way perhaps much more significant.

Little Lord Fauntleroy and *Heidi* are similar in many respects. The main characters in both novels, Cedric and Heidi, represent the virtuous model. Both novels also have a foil of an elderly cantankerous male caregiver that the child character is able to transform through his and her innate virtue. Neither Cedric nor Heidi chooses to be given into the care of the elderly male. Both children are forced into situations where they had never met their new caregivers, but that fact does not upset them. Neither child worries about liking or being treated well by the caregiver because they do not possess the ability to see anything but good in a person. This quality is central to the virtuous model. To be a virtuous model, and not a model of performance virtue, the child must be unaware of their virtue and their ability to influence others through their

virtuous actions. However, the ability still exists, and it extends beyond the confines of the pages of the text. The virtuous model is able to influence the child reader as well. While the readers cannot become innately virtuous people, they can see the rewards that come from it and perform as if they are, essentially becoming a performance virtue model.

CHAPTER II: VIRTUE AS PERFORMANCE

The model of performance virtue is much like the virtuous model; however, the character who is acting in a virtuous manner does not act that way because it comes naturally to him or her, rather he or she behaves that way because that behavior is what pleases others. The main difference between the two is in the child character's mind; the performance virtue child character is entirely aware of what behavior is considered virtuous and that he or she does not innately possess that virtuous manner. The didactic tale "was reshaped to suit the temper of the times . . . it took on a more human aspect, emphasizing the importance of character building" (M. Thwaite 93). The performance virtue model is the most active character out of the three models presented, and it is also the most realistic. The model must be engaged in the process of learning virtue in the same way the child reader must be engaged during the reading of didactic literature. The character of Rose in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* (1875) and the character of Anne in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) are good textual examples of the performance virtue model.

As Claudia Mills points out, the character that is the model of performance virtue may be practicing until he or she gets it right, but the

character is definitely aware of what is considered virtuous and struggles to get it right. In Alcott's *Eight Cousins* the performance virtue model is extremely clear. It gives child readers hope that they may one day perform as if they are and be given the same happiness an innately virtuous person receives because "virtue is not taught through formal instruction, but acquired through 'habituation' – learned through doing" (Mills 116). The idea of instilling virtue into children may seem like a tedious task; however, "Alcott's books were sufficiently entertaining so as to make readers, even today, tend to overlook how much preaching is in them. In fact, they were quite didactic" (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 14). Alcott chose to hide her lessons while many authors of the time, such as the previously discussed Burnett, were not. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett's goal of teaching virtue was more prominent within the text. This difference between the two authors can be explained by their views of children. Burnett believed, at least early in her career, that childhood should be looked at with nostalgia. Her focus had shifted by the time she published *The Secret Garden*, but while she wrote *Fauntleroy* she believed that children were innocent and born virtuous and good, and that in order to be happy people needed to retain that virtue throughout their lives. She said that "the one perfect thing in my life was the childhood of my boys" (qtd. in A. Thwaite 80). Alcott, however, "saw childhood primarily as a period of preparation; children were properly engaged in learning, becoming, forming a worthy character

for the future; certainly they were not considered finished and wholly admirable as they were” (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 23). This disparity accounts for the varying methods of communicating the lesson to the child. Because Burnett believed children were innately virtuous, *Fauntleroy* focused on showing child readers how to retain that virtue; Alcott focused more on showing child readers how to learn virtue by depicting characters going through that learning process because her pedagogy was analogous to Aristotle’s “belief in the possibility of habituating children into virtue” (Mills 112).

Rose, in Alcott’s *Eight Cousins*, knows she lacks innate virtue, but she strives to at least be perceived as virtuous and perhaps even become virtuous. Rose is a child who is orphaned at the age of thirteen and sent to live with relatives. Uncle Alec is to be her legal guardian, but she also has six aunts who live either in the house or down the street; there are seven cousins, all boys, as well. The novel opens with Rose adjusting to her new life on the “Aunt Hill,” as her cousins call it. She is pale, frail, and sick when she first arrives, and her Uncle Alec, a medical doctor, prescribes play and physical activity in order to get healthy. Once she begins wearing less restrictive clothing and playing outside with her cousins, she becomes healthy and gets color in her face. Rose also develops a friendship with a young house-maid named Phebe who is only a few years older than Rose and can imitate the sound of a bird singing. Rose is drawn to her at first because of this talent, but soon begins to

like Phebe because she is an innately virtuous person who understands Rose's insecurity in her new home. The first instance of friendship between the girls occurs shortly after they meet. Phebe is cleaning beans while she is talking to Rose, and Rose begins to cry:

Phebe stopped rattling her beans from one pan to the other, and her eyes were full of pity . . . for she saw that the heart under the pretty locket ached with its loss, and the dainty apron was used to dry sadder tears than any she had ever shed. (Alcott 7)

Phebe's virtues of empathy and caring are displayed to both the reader and Rose, and her innate virtue represents the overlap between two models. The virtuous model and the performance virtue model are both present in *Eight Cousins*, but the main character is representative of performance virtue. This may be because "the favored literary device for making the most of example – both good and bad – was that of contrast" (MacLeod, *Moral Tale* 49). Performance virtue texts usually provide a foil for the character focused on in order to highlight the lesson that is being imparted through the main character. In *Eight Cousins*, that foil is Phebe.

The reader is not given much insight into the character of Rose at first, but it soon becomes clear that she wants to please. Rose is quick to eat oatmeal that Uncle Alec prepares for her, simply because he wants her to, even though she hates the food. She wakes up early to learn to

milk because he tells her she should drink fresh milk every morning. And she begins to wear her belt loose, and then not at all, because Uncle Alec believes she should be able to run about and breathe heavily without restraint. Rose immediately follows every suggestion that Uncle Alec makes in her eagerness to please him. While the incidents mentioned may seem like small matters, they have great significance. Rose's instinct to please is used in her development into a virtuous person. Rose is aware that good morals, character, and virtue are the qualities that Uncle Alec wants her to possess. He wants her to mature into a woman who thinks of others first and is kind-hearted: someone who has empathy. However, Rose's demonstrations of virtue throughout the novel are just that, demonstrations. Rose is not an example of an innately virtuous character like Cedric or Heidi. She is not one of the "romantic children whose inborn perfection would give them a mission to redeem adults. [Alcott's] fictional children still achieved moral character gradually, with effort and lapses, and under the careful tutelage of adults" (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 150). Rose must demonstrate her virtue for others in order to achieve true virtue within herself.

Therefore, Rose is outwardly virtuous. The best example of her performance of virtue is the Fourth of July celebration. The cousins have set up a camping trip for the Fourth of July and Rose has been surprised with the expedition. She is having a wonderful time when the thought occurs to her that she would like to have Phebe there to enjoy it also. At

first she wants Phebe to be there to keep her company, and then another thought crosses her mind. Uncle Alec has just told a story about a brave sailor who sacrificed a place on a raft for a woman and Rose realizes that Uncle Alec seemed to admire the man for his virtue. She mentions to him that “people who make sacrifices are very much loved and admired, aren’t they?” at which point Uncle Alec tells her that they are and that sacrifice is a beautiful virtue (Alcott 109). Rose believes that if she switches places with Phebe then Phebe will be able to experience the fun on the island camping trip. It is only after getting reassurance from Uncle Alec that she will be rewarded if she sacrifices her joy for Phebe that she concocts a plan to switch places with her. In fact, even after she has sent Phebe to the island she hopes that the others are missing her. However, the clearest evidence that Rose’s virtue is simply a misguided performance for others, and not an innate quality in her, is her emotional response to the reaction of the others when she sacrifices for Phebe: “Rose’s sacrifice was a failure in one respect, for, though the elders loved her the better for it, and showed that they did, the boys were not inspired with the sudden respect which she had hoped for. In fact, her feelings were much hurt” (Alcott 121). Even though Rose says she wants no reward or praise for her sacrifice, Alcott makes sure that the reader knows she truly does. Rose performs as if she has empathy for Phebe’s lack of playful excursions, cares about the fairness of Phebe working so hard and not receiving any play time, and has a responsibility to make

sure Phebe enjoys life as a child; however, she primarily wants to please the people around her with her displays of virtues and to garner accolades for them. While Rose's decision to choose Phebe as her replacement does show she has sympathy for Phebe's position as a young housemaid, she has not yet mastered the virtue of true empathy. She simply knows what is expected of her, and she strives to meet that expectation.

Another instance in which Rose is led by Uncle Alec to act virtuously is in learning a trade. She tells him that she would like to learn a trade so that she might be independent and asks for his suggestions. When Uncle Alec suggests she take up housekeeping, Rose is at first disappointed: "Is that an accomplishment?' asked Rose, while her face fell" (Alcott 185). She does not see the value in housekeeping because it is a

trade that takes place only in the private, and never in the public, sphere; one practiced backstage, behind the scenes, rather than in the spotlight; the trade most invisible, unappreciated, and farthest removed from open appreciation and applause. (Mills 121)

However, Uncle Alec tells her that Aunt Plenty is a housekeeper and that she is beloved and respected for it. Of course this assertion that the trade of housekeeping could bring one love and respect is all that it takes for Rose to change her mind because she is not really looking for a job

that will allow her to help others; she is looking for a job that will fulfill her desire to please others and garner praise. She replies to Uncle Alec, “I should like to have people feel so about me” (Alcott 186). However, her immediate reversal of sentiment towards housekeeping when she learns that others will love her for it suggests that Rose is being taught to perform virtue and is not a virtuous model herself. At this point in the novel, she lacks the real virtue and desire to help others.

The difference between Cedric and Rose is in their individual reactions to virtuous deeds. Burnett’s Cedric is shown to have a natural endowment of virtue. He never wonders how others will perceive his actions because he is motivated instead by his innate knowledge that he is doing the right thing. However, “Alcott’s children are basically good and well intentioned, but they are always less than perfect” including Rose (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 149). Rose must learn how to act, and eventually be, virtuous. She must be shown that others are pleased with her when she acts virtuously. Burnett’s lesson through *Fauntleroy* is that children are born virtuous and that society should work to commend that instead of censuring it, while Alcott’s lesson through *Eight Cousins* is that it is the parent figure’s job to teach the child good morals so that s/he will have a sound character and it is the child’s job to practice performance virtue in order to learn it.

The child reader is indoctrinated with this lesson by the end of the story through the model of Rose, who begins to exhibit true virtue for

herself and not for others who may be watching the performance. Near the end of the novel, Rose is having a conversation with Phebe when she notices that Phebe has been trying to give herself an education with old books and poor, shabby utensils. Rose's immediate reaction is to cry out, "To think what a selfish girl I am, to have loads of books and things and never remember to give you some" (Alcott 262). She feels badly that she has not offered to help Phebe previously, and she offers her not only supplies, but also to be her teacher. The girls begin work right away on the task of providing a proper education for Phebe. The fact that Rose comes up with this plan on her own, and not after realizing that it is what others would want her to do, is representative of how much Rose has grown in her virtue and how she has learned through her performances.

The character of Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables* is also a representation of performance virtue. *Anne of Green Gables* begins with the story of Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert – siblings who live in Avonlea at their farm, Green Gables. The reader is first introduced to Marilla as she explains to Mrs. Lynde that Matthew and she are adopting a boy from an orphanage to help around the farm. However, when Matthew arrives at the train station to pick up the desired boy, he finds a girl instead; due to a mix-up with the message, an eleven-year-old girl is brought to Avonlea for Matthew and Marilla. At first, Marilla does not want anything to do with Anne. However, after Matthew tells her he

wants to keep Anne, and Marilla realizes that Anne would be sent to live with a cold-hearted woman and made to be a slave to her children if she does not keep her, Marilla relents and decides to keep Anne in her home. Anne loves Green Gables. She has never lived in the country before, and she immediately becomes bosom friends with a neighboring girl, Diana. Anne has a quick temper, and she gets herself in trouble with it on several occasions upon making her new life in Avonlea. However, she reconciles those wrongs and becomes a model student at the Avonlea school. Through her studies, and her competition with Gilbert Blythe, Anne becomes one of the students selected to be in the Queen's class to become a teacher. Not only does she pass the exam into the school, but she is at the top of the list. Anne finishes her studies in one year, and she is also awarded the Avery scholarship to attend Redmond College. When Anne returns home at the end of the school year, she is greeted by an unhealthy Matthew and Marilla. Matthew has had heart problems and Marilla is losing her eyesight. Shortly after her return, Matthew dies and Marilla is faced with selling Green Gables because she cannot take care of it alone. However, Anne decides to give up the Avery scholarship, stay with Marilla, and take a teaching job there so that Green Gables can be saved. Gilbert Blythe, the boy Anne had been competing with her entire life, ends up being her salvation. He gives up the Avonlea school so that Anne may have it and he takes White Sands school instead. The

story ends with Anne and Gilbert becoming close friends and Green Gables safe under Anne's guidance.

Anne is another example of a child whose virtue is, at least initially, a performance rather than an innate quality. The ideal child of the Golden Age "*wanted* to be good, and the best writers, and a large proportion of the lesser ones too, had the gift of making simple goodness seem extraordinarily attractive" (Avery 133-34). While it might be argued that Anne is more of a virtuous model than a performance virtue model, I disagree. It is true that Anne acts in a virtuous manner in the majority of her interactions with others, but Anne is extremely aware of how she is expected to act in order to be seen as a virtuous person. This awareness is what drives many of her decisions to behave the way that she does, and it is also what keeps her from falling into the category of the virtuous model.

The first instance of Anne's performance virtue is in the form of an apology. When Marilla decides to keep Anne, Mrs. Lynde comes by to see the girl. Upon Mrs. Lynde's first sight of Anne, she tells Marilla:

"She's terrible skinny and homely, Marilla. Come here, child, and let me have a look at you. Lawful heart, did anyone see such freckles? And hair as red as carrots."

(Montgomery 112)

Anne's temper flares and she storms at Mrs. Lynde crying: "I hate you . . . How dare you call me skinny and ugly? How dare you say I'm freckled

and red-headed? You are a rude, impolite, unfeeling woman”

(Montgomery 112). The next day Anne is made to go to Mrs. Lynde and apologize for her outburst. At first, Anne is adamant about not apologizing because she is not sorry. However, Marilla forces Anne to walk with her to Mrs. Lynde’s house and apologize. On the way over, Marilla notices that Anne suddenly becomes extremely happy. Once there, Anne began her apology:

“Oh, Mrs. Lynde, I am so extremely sorry . . . I could never express all my sorrow, no, not if I used up a whole dictionary. You must just imagine it. I behaved terribly to you – and I’ve disgraced the dear friends, Matthew and Marilla, who have let me stay at Green Gables although I’m not a boy. I’m a dreadfully wicked and ungrateful girl, and I deserve to be punished and cast out by respectable people for ever . . . Oh, Mrs. Lynde, please, please forgive me. If you refuse it will be a lifelong sorrow to me. You wouldn’t like to inflict a lifelong sorrow on a poor little orphan girl, would you, even if she had a dreadful temper? Oh, I am sure you wouldn’t. Please say you forgive me, Mrs. Lynde.”

(Montgomery 120)

Marilla “understood in dismay that Anne was actually enjoying her valley of humiliation – was reveling in the thoroughness of her abasement”

(Montgomery 121). As Marilla and Anne are walking home from Mrs.

Lynde's, Anne says to Marilla, "I apologized pretty well, didn't I? I thought since I had to do it I might as well do it thoroughly" (Montgomery 122). The fact that Anne takes pleasure in apologizing in an exaggerated way, and then seeks praise from Marilla regarding the apology, proves that Anne is not truly repentant. Anne is simply striving to act in a way that portrays the qualities that Marilla has been trying to teach her. If she actually possessed those virtues, then she would have offered her own apology before Marilla forced her to, and she would have given an apology without looking for praise for her action afterward. Her knowledge of what is expected of her, and her desire to meet those expectations, is what makes her a model of performance virtue.

A second incident that portrays Anne's performance virtue involves an amethyst brooch that belongs to Marilla. One day Marilla's brooch is missing, and Anne admits to having taken it off the dresser, but she insists she put it back after playing with it. Marilla doesn't believe Anne and decides to punish her by not allowing her to go to the church picnic unless she confesses what she did with it. At first, Anne refuses to confess. However, on the day of the picnic Anne tells Marilla that she is ready to confess: "I took the amethyst brooch," said Anne, as if repeating a lesson she had learned. "I took it just as you said" (Montgomery 144). Marilla is furious:

"Anne, this is terrible," she said, trying to speak calmly. "You are the very wickedest girl I ever heard of."

“Yes, I suppose I am,” agreed Anne tranquilly. “And I know I’ll have to be punished. It’ll be your duty to punish me, Marilla. Won’t you please get it over right off because I’d like to go to the picnic with nothing on my mind.”

“Picnic, indeed! You’ll go to no picnic to-day, Anne Shirley. That shall be your punishment.” (Montgomery 144)

Anne counters passionately, “But you *promised* me I might! Oh, Marilla, I must go to the picnic. That was why I confessed” (Montgomery 144). A few hours later, Marilla finds the brooch caught in a scarf that she had been wearing that day and realizes that Anne never took it after all.

When she confronts Anne about the untruthful confession Anne replies, “Why, you said you’d keep me here until I confessed, and so I decided to confess because I was bound to get to the picnic” (Montgomery 147).

Anne shows that she lacks a real understanding between right and wrong. She is willing to lie and confess to something that she did not do in order to get what she wants. She wants to be perceived as someone who is honest, but she does not know how to balance honesty and her own desires because she is not innately virtuous. A truly virtuous model would have stuck with the story of innocence because he or she would understand that a confession would be a lie. An innately virtuous character would be unable to lie and would simply wait for the situation to resolve itself, much like Heidi does while waiting to be returned to the Alm-Uncle from Frankfurt. She is unhappy, but she does not lie or take

any action to obtain her desire to be returned to the Alm-Uncle.

However, the situation resolves itself through her sleep-walking because the virtuous model is always rewarded, though often after suffering.

Anne, as a performance virtue model, is asked to perform in a virtuous manner until she learns true virtue for herself. As Anne gets older, Matthew begins to notice that her clothing is not the same as the girls she socializes with. He decides that she deserves a nice dress for Christmas, and commissions Mrs. Lynde to make it for him. After Anne receives her gift, she herself admits that she is a model of performance virtue. She says that, “at times like this I’m sorry I’m not a model little girl; and I always resolve that I will be in future. But somehow it’s hard to carry out your resolutions when irresistible temptations come” (Montgomery 237). Anne knows that she does not innately possess virtue, but she does want to learn and display those virtues. Anne, much like the child reader is expected to do, becomes virtuous over time. The fact that she is resolved to continue with her performance of virtue, even in tough times, is indicative of her desire to learn through practice. This idea has persisted for years and has even spawned clichés such as “practice makes perfect.” It is interesting that the Golden Age may have given children’s literature some of the best examples of this ideology.

In some cases of performance virtue “the heroine had to make some kind of sacrifice” (O’Keefe 103). Rose makes a small sacrifice of her weekend vacation so that Phebe can take her place, while Anne makes a

truer sacrifice of the Avery scholarship in order to go home and take care of Marilla and Green Gables. The decision to return home to Green Gables in exchange for her scholarship opportunity is a hard one for Anne because she had worked hard for her scholarship and is proud when she learns of her accomplishment:

Somebody called out:

“Three cheers for Miss Shirley, winner of the Avery!”

“Oh, Anne,” gasped Jane, as they fled to the girls’ dressing-room amid hearty cheers. “Oh, Anne, I’m so proud! Isn’t it splendid?”

. . . She was pushed and pulled and hugged and among it all she managed to whisper to Jane:

“Oh, won’t Matthew and Marilla be pleased! I must write the news home right away.” (Montgomery 315)

But Anne has grown over the years into a well-practiced model of performance virtue and she knows the right thing to do. Her struggle begins when Matthew dies because she is simultaneously devastated by the loss and worried about Marilla. She tells Marilla, “It’s our sorrow – yours and mine. Oh, Marilla, what will we do without him?”

(Montgomery 322). Anne has already lost Matthew, and she can’t bear the thought of also losing the only home she has ever known, even if it means admitting to Marilla, and herself, “I’m not going to take the scholarship” (Montgomery 327). So, she resolves to stay and help

Marilla. Through her years of performance virtue, she has learned what is considered the right thing to do. She is still mostly performing virtue in this instance, but now her performance of virtue serves everyone's well being and not just her own.

Both Rose and Anne practice virtue through their performance. However, it is the knowledge of what virtue is and what is expected of them to be considered virtuous that keeps either girl from being a virtuous model. Over thirty years transpired between the publication of *Eight Cousins* and *Anne of Green Gables*, but the same model was used in both novels. It is possible that this model persisted for as long as it did because it is realistic. It presents a character who has many layers, unlike the virtuous model, and who is able to show growth and transformation within the text. The performance virtue model is a likable child with whom readers, child and adult alike, can identify and want to share.

CHAPTER III: DISREGARD OF VIRTUE

The final model used in children's literature to teach the child reader to live virtuously is the disregard of virtue model. This model may be seen in a character that neither possesses innate qualities of virtue nor strives to exhibit those qualities through performance. The model is note-worthy because the main character of the story is not one for the child to emulate. Instead, the child reader must glean the moral from the story themselves, understanding it as a cautionary tale of what not to become. MacLeod maintains that "for every model of excellence in children's stories there was likely to be an example of mistake and misery meant to warn children of the ill effects of some particular character flaw" (*Moral Tale* 49). The texts discussed in this chapter present those examples of mistake and misery. Laura, from Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) and Peter from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) are strong textual examples of the disregard of virtue model.

The disregard of virtue model presents a character with no innate virtue who chooses to not perform in a virtuous manner either, but to instead give in to their temptations. That character is usually harmed in some way to show the possible consequences of living without exhibiting

virtue; however the text often does not stop there. The intended outcome is for the child to learn what not to do and choose to live virtuously instead, but the disregard of virtue is definitely the most complicated model of the three presented in this thesis. Both Rossetti and Potter's texts follow "young, rebellious characters who ignore the advice of others to pursue luscious temptation in the forms of fruits or vegetables" (Cummins 79). Both also make use of the disregard of virtue model and follow that character through several stages including the offending behavior, the punishment, and the redemption. The redemption of the disregard of virtue character is what complicates the model.

The first stage is the offending behavior. Laura and Peter "slip away from the paths of obedience to pursue the oral pleasures that put them in grave danger" (Cummins 81). The second stage is the punishment: "The repercussions of the two protagonists' pleasure come quickly and painfully. Both fall ill soon after their indulgence" (Cummins 83). Laura's illness takes a few hours to occur while Peter's illness is immediate, but both are saved from their illness. This is where the third stage, redemption, comes in: "Both Laura and Peter are nursed back to health through the administration of food by maternal figures" (Cummins 83). The fact that the disregard of virtue character goes on to live a happy and healthy life complicates the cautionary aspect of the model. However, it also may be what draws the child reader into the text in the first place. Rossetti "has written a feminist, pro-woman tale, [and] Potter

has written a *pro-child* story, and that may, in the end, explain its enduring popularity” (Cummins 94). The fact that the disregard of virtue character, a child, is redeemed, gives the child reader the feeling of power; however, the idea that there will be some kind of punishment for not acting virtuously is also placed within the text.

Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* contains a disregard of virtue character in Laura, while her sister, Lizzie, provides a virtuous model. Where the sisters live, there is a glen in which goblin men wander at night and try to sell fruit to the maidens. Both Laura and Lizzie know of another girl who bought and ate the goblin fruit, and then died shortly after. Lizzie takes the story of the other girl to heart, and she refuses to even look at the goblin men as they pass. However, Laura is curious about who the goblin men are and what they are selling. So, when “Lizzie veiled her blushes” as the goblin men pass “Laura bowed her head to hear” (Rossetti 1-2). Lizzie decides to run home, but Laura stays and exchanges a lock of her golden hair for some fruit from the goblin men. The next day, Laura is anxious for the dusk when the goblin men will come out. However, when the men do appear, only Lizzie can hear and see them: Laura has tasted the fruit and therefore must long for it forevermore. Laura slowly starts to wither into death as Lizzie watches.

The poem encompasses the disregard of virtue model with Laura. Laura’s character has a foil character in her sister Lizzie who helps to highlight the lack of virtue in Laura. Lizzie knows that she should not

long for that which does not belong to her. In the end, Lizzie is able to save Laura by being morally strong and virtuous and standing up to the goblin men. Lizzie goes to the goblins and asks to buy some fruit. They try to force her to eat it by pushing it in her face and squeezing the juices on her mouth, but she refuses to let any of it in. Once the men have given up, Lizzie runs home to Laura and provides the juice that the goblin men squeezed onto her face for Laura to drink. Laura can no longer taste the juice, but it provides the antidote to her ailment and she is saved.

Laura could only have been saved by her sister. The last girl who ate the fruit died as a result of her actions, and she didn't have a virtuous sister to come to her rescue. If it weren't for Lizzie, the lack of virtue in Laura's character would have been her downfall: "In fiction, therefore, children discovered the error of their ways through the sad experience that inevitably followed wrongdoing in books" (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 103).

Laura desires something that she should not have. She has a strong desire for the fruit of the goblin men, almost to the point of coveting. She continues to want more after having tasted the fruit because the fruit was cursed by the goblin-men. Her strong desire for more causes her to become weak and she cannot receive nourishment from anything else. After a few days, "Her hair grew thin and grey;/She dwindled" (Rossetti 8). Without Lizzie's virtue, Laura would be dead.

The disregard Laura has for virtue, and her indulgences in gluttony and disobedience, are important. However, this poem works on many levels as it also aims to be a cautionary tale against sexual promiscuity. *Goblin Market* has a wide audience, including the child reader, which is the audience I have chosen to focus on. Therefore, this reading focuses on the disregard of virtue in reference to those child readers, and not on the disregard of virtue pertaining to sexuality. With that in mind, the reader can see that Laura also lacks the virtue of empathy.

Laura lacks empathy because she did not take the story of the girl who died after eating the goblin fruit, the story of Jeanie, to heart. If she had been able to empathize with Jeanie then she might never have tasted the fruit for herself in the first place. As Laura is suffering, Lizzie is trying to come up with a way to save her sister. She “Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,/But feared to pay too dear./She thought of Jeanie in her grave,/who should have been a bride” (Rossetti 9). Those who possess the virtues of caring and empathy are sometimes able to learn from others’ mistakes and benefit from them without having to suffer those mistakes and miseries themselves. Lizzie is able to empathize with Jeanie and does not eat the fruit herself, but once Laura seems to be “knocking at Death’s door . . . [she] weighed no more” and Lizzie sets out to buy the fruit her sister so desperately needs (Rossetti 9).

Lizzie exemplifies the virtues of empathy, caring, and courage when she goes to the goblin men to get fruit for Laura's sake, despite the danger to herself, and she displays her loyalty towards her sister when she will not give up on her life. The foil provided should help the child reader understand the downfall that comes as a result of disregarding virtue and the success that comes with being virtuous. If the disregard of virtue model has no innate virtue, and chooses to behave in a way that exhibits no virtue, then the readers should be able to understand that the disregard of virtue character is something they want to avoid becoming. There may not always be a virtuous person to save the life of the disregard of virtue character. The fact that Laura is saved, or redeemed, in the end does not negate the fact that she pays a price for giving in to temptation. The redeemed Laura actually helps to impart that lesson because at the end of the poem Laura has become a cautionary tale herself and is telling her own children "of her early prime" and warning them against the dangers of temptation (Rossetti 15).

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Beatrix Potter, also presents a character who embodies the disregard of virtue model. This brief story centers on Peter, with brief mention of his three sisters, Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail. They are all told by their mother to stay away from Mr. McGregor's garden because their "father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor" (Potter 9). The sister bunnies do as they are told, but Peter goes straight into Mr. McGregor's garden and gorges

on vegetables. Mr. McGregor sees Peter stealing his vegetables and chases him all around the garden trying to kill him. Peter gets himself into a difficult situation, but he ultimately squeezes back under the gate and runs to freedom. When he arrives home, he is missing his nice clothes, so his mother instantly knows that he was doing something he should not have been. She sends him to bed with nothing but chamomile tea for supper, and he has to watch his sisters eat bread, milk, and blackberries without him.

Some might argue that *Peter Rabbit* is simply an adventure story for the child reader that is meant to symbolize exploration and that Peter is not a disregard of virtue model. Melissa Gross states, “Peter’s adventure is an exploration of the socialized world, symbolized by Mr. McGregor’s garden” (149). However, I believe that Peter’s character has more depth than that. Humphrey Carpenter suggests that when it comes to Beatrix Potter “there is nothing in her work that resembles the moral tale. In fact it might be argued that she is writing something pretty close to a series of immoral tales” (Avery and Briggs 279). I contend that *Peter Rabbit* is a combination of both an adventure story and a cautionary tale of the disregard of virtue model because Peter is in real danger of being killed by Mr. McGregor for his lack of virtue.

It might also be argued that Peter does not fit the disregard of virtue model because he is a rabbit. However, Peter is personified and thus eligible for the disregard of virtue model. In the beginning of the

story, Peter wears shoes and a “blue jacket with brass buttons, quite new” (Potter 13). He walks upright in a civilized manner, personified, enjoying the treasures of the garden. Things change when he loses his shoes and jacket. He is forced to become more animal than human, and he “ran on four legs” (Potter 13). The illustrations of Peter from that point on, including two illustrations later where Peter is depicted hopping, his back feet pushing off the ground for speed, trying to escape from under the basket of Mr. McGregor, are very animalistic and lack the human appearance and demeanor. The fact that Peter is a rabbit may complicate the disregard of virtue model, but Peter is appealing to the reader “not because he is an animal (although he must revert to his natural animal state in order to survive) but because he is a *child*” (Cummins 93). He encapsulates the disregard of virtue model because he makes conscious choices in his behavior: he gives in to his desires instead of choosing to perform in a virtuous manner.

The first thing Peter does to display his lack of innate virtue is go into Mr. McGregor’s garden. He has been strictly forbidden to do so by his mother when she says, “you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don’t go into Mr. McGregor’s garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor” (Potter 9). However, he does not seem to be listening to her guidelines. The illustration accompanying those instructions shows Peter standing to the side and looking off to the right, possibly toward his adventure, while his sisters

look at their mother on the left. He also does not heed her warnings because he is “very naughty [and he] ran straight away to Mr. McGregor’s garden” (Potter 11). The illustration of Peter eating the “lettuces and some French Beans” speaks volumes (Potter 11). Peter is sitting upright with radishes in both his hands. His head is raised in triumph and he is nibbling on one radish while his feet are crossed in a playful manner. He is having the time of his life, and, to him, this is more important than obeying his mother’s wishes or heeding her warning. If he were a virtuous model then he would have the virtue of obedience and he would not have gone into Mr. McGregor’s garden. However, Peter is a disregard of virtue model and therefore his role is to provide the child reader with a character that faces a grave danger, in this case, death at the hands of Mr. McGregor.

Peter’s lack of virtue is also shown through his stealing and eating of Mr. McGregor’s vegetables. He has no regard for what is right and wrong, and he has no desire to act according to those standards. He simply wants to do as he pleases and does not think about the consequences. To him, the adventure of going into the garden and eating vegetables that do not belong to him is more important than figuring out what virtue is and why actions are classified as right and wrong. The remainder of the story is about Peter trying to get away which helps heighten the fear for the reader of Peter being caught and eaten, but if he had possessed any virtue to begin with, or even if he had wanted to

perform in a way that might be seen as virtuous as Rose and Anne did, then he would not have ventured into Mr. McGregor's garden in the first place. Unfortunately, Peter does not seem to learn his lesson within the pages of *Peter Rabbit*. It is suggested, through the introductory illustration, that Peter has suffered a dosing of chamomile tea as punishment prior to the text itself, probably for a similar situation since his mother notices that "it was the second little jacket and pair of shoes that Peter had lost in a fortnight," and he did not learn his lesson after that instance either (Potter 18). However, children's texts often work on two levels: one level for the character, and one level for the reader; therefore, it is expected that the child readers infer the lesson for themselves through Peter's actions.

The disregard of virtue model may be the hardest one for the child reader to learn from because the main character is not one that the child should emulate, but it can also be the most entertaining because the story often has some kind of adventure during which the disregard of virtue model tries to outrun the consequences of his or her actions. These often function as cautionary tales because they attempt to warn the child reader of what may happen if they do not either listen to their innate virtue or learn to perform in a virtuous manner.

It may be argued that one cannot assume the child reader will make the connection between the disregard of virtue character and what not to do. However, Arthur Dobrin asserts that "good literature – prose

and poetry – is a lesson in the uniqueness of lives, the singleness of experience . . . they enable children to discover their own answers, to reach their own conclusions” (58). He actually does not like the virtuous model and performance virtue model because he feels they are too didactic and that “our job as adults, then, is not to scream, ‘Here’s the lesson, pay attention now,’ as do [some authors] but, rather, to provide the framework of values so the choices our children make are informed ones” (59). While the disregard of virtue model is probably also too didactic for Dobrin’s taste, it is the least sermonizing of the three, and the child reader should be given the benefit of the doubt in their ability to recognize characters like Lizzie and Peter who disregard virtue and model what not to do.

CONCLUSION

Authors of the Golden Age were able to harness models of teaching virtue and create an era of children's literature that surpasses any other in terms of best sellers. Since the inception of literature for children there have been many attempts to teach children to live virtuous, moral lives – and what those morals are. The methods differ, but the message remains the same; in order to be loved, respected, and happy one must have virtue, morals, and a sound character. If a child possesses those qualities, or strives to act in a way that conveys those qualities, then he or she will do well, but if a child simply rejects them altogether, there may be dire consequences.

Not only do many of the characters from Golden Age literature share virtues, but they also share an ability to transform others with their virtue. Heidi is faced first with her grandfather and then with the doctor, transforming the Alm-Uncle from a hermit on a mountain to a jolly neighbor that the townspeople loved, then bringing joy back into the doctor's life after his own daughter had passed away. Cedric is able to give humane characteristics, such as laughter and good will, to the old Earl.

Even performance virtue models are sometimes able to transform others. Anne is faced with Marilla:

a tall thin woman, with angles and without curves . . .
 [whose hair] was always twisted up in a hard little knot
 behind with two wire hairpins stuck aggressively through it.
 She looked like a woman of narrow experience and rigid
 conscience, which she was; but there was a saving
 something about her mouth which, if it had been ever so
 slightly developed, might have been considered indicative of
 a sense of humour. (Montgomery 57)

Marilla wanted to send Anne back to the orphanage because she is not a boy, but Anne is able to burrow into Marilla's heart with her desire to be virtuous and her willingness to try. By the end of the novel Marilla realizes that "the lesson of a love that should display itself easily in spoken word and open look was one Marilla could never learn. But she had learned to love [Anne] with an affection all the deeper and stronger from its very undemonstrativeness" (Montgomery 271). Marilla does achieve the sense of humour and the power to love.

Sometimes there is even transformation within a story that contains a disregard of virtue model. In *Goblin Market* Lizzie is able to transform her sister Laura, the disregard of virtue character, through her life-saving actions. When Lizzie returns from the Goblin men with the juices for Laura, Laura "Clutched her hair: / [and cried] 'Lizzie, Lizzie, have

you tasted/For my sake the fruit forbidden?” (Rossetti 14). She displays her first virtue, caring. And once Laura drinks the juices and falls asleep, she “awoke as from a dream,/Laughed in the innocent old way, Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice” (Rossetti 15). She responds with gratitude and loyalty to the sister who saved her.

The didactic tools of teaching virtue and morals by utilizing the virtuous model, performance virtue model, and disregard of virtue model experienced a major resurgence during the Golden Age of children’s literature. The techniques established during this major era of children’s literature can still be recognized in modern day texts for children as the three models are still present today, albeit in different forms. There has been no other literary period in which the majority of best-selling books were written for children, although the current rise in series books written for children, including J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series, may be changing that.

But why has there not been a time period when the bestselling books contain overt teachings of virtue between the Golden Age and modern day? Perhaps “the most fundamental and certainly the least subtle change is in the relationships within families” (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 199). The children’s literature of the 1970s “reveals an astonishing hostility toward parents” that would suggest the child reader would not be willing to take advice or any didactic lesson from an adult (MacLeod, *American Childhood* 200). The loss of the hierarchy of the

relationship between parent and child could symbolize the same loss between society and child. The decline in the number of children's books that follow these didactic models may have had the unintended effect of shifting what our society deems virtuous away from empathy, obedience, and helpfulness. When one lives without empathy, then ignoring the problems of others becomes an option; without obedience, living according to one's own rules instead of society's laws becomes an option; and without helpfulness, selfishness becomes the norm. These options may have led to a society that values self above all else, and without valuing others as well a society cannot function effectively or humanely.

The virtuous model, while sometimes overly didactic, is undeniably effective. When a child reads about a character who reaps only the benefits in life and none of the bad, then the child will most likely want that as well. However, the contemporary reader, much like the readers towards the end of Burnett's career, is more likely to see through this model. The current problem with this model is that the authors of the Golden Age using the virtuous model were using the model to "push particular agendas," and those agendas are not necessarily applicable to today's youth (Dobrin 57).

The performance virtue model, while extremely similar to the virtuous model, is more true to real life. There are usually more factors influencing who reaps the benefits and who suffers hardships than just the virtue present in one's soul. This model is able to portray that

through the text and give the readers hope that as long as they act in a virtuous manner then they may still reap the benefits. There are problems with this model for the modern day reader as well. One mother, Wendy Smith, stumbled upon one of the problems when she began reading literature from the Golden Age to her son. She says that, "I was startled by how peculiar some of them now seemed . . . I found myself noticing strange subtexts and odd authorial attitudes that had escaped my attention as a child" (126). However, those strange subtexts were not escaping her son. She recalls seeing "my four-year-old's face assuming the blank expression he favored when confronted by old ladies speaking baby talk to him on the street" (127). The performance virtue model is often too didactic for the modern day child readers who desire more adventure in their novels.

The disregard of virtue model is the least didactic and provides the most entertainment. It allows the reader to experience the adventure of the disregard of virtue character while also seeing the possible consequences if he or she chooses to act that way themselves. It is my favorite because it does not stifle the child reader or put a strict code of action on the child; it just reminds them of the negative consequences of certain behaviors.

However, even the disregard of virtue model is not the best model for the modern day child reader because it may be too simplistic. It seems that best-selling authors like J.K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer

have embraced a new model in their *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series. I believe these series represent a connection to the Golden Age; they target the child reader, employ overt methods of teaching virtue, cross the aisle to be entertaining to adult readers as well, and are best sellers. The model they utilize has no name as of yet, but it seems to dispose of the virtuous model while encompassing a mixture of the other two presented here because “literature absorbs change, and presents it again with its sharper edges blunted” (MacLeod *American Childhood* 214).

There is usually a performance virtuous model, like Harry or Edward, who is flawed. For instance, Harry knows the difference between right and wrong, but he is often forced to find a middle ground between the two when put into difficult situations, and Edward is a vampire whose very nature calls to him to do the wrong thing in taking the lives of others, but he chooses to do the right thing and go against his nature, thus performing in a virtuous manner. The character of Jasper in *Twilight* would also fit the performance virtue model. He knows what the Cullen family expects of him, but he has an extremely hard time maintaining the performance of virtue. There is usually a disregard of virtue character as well in this new model. The disregard of virtue character usually functions as the villain within the novel and propels the conflict. In *Harry Potter* that character is Lord Voldemort, the wizard that killed Harry’s father: Voldemort possesses no innate virtue and gives in to his temptation to cleanse the world of Muggles and half-breeds

despite the fact that Dumbledore, who was once his mentor, tries to point him on the right path. In *Twilight* that character is James, the vampire that tracks Bella: James possesses no innate virtue and gives in to his temptation for Bella's blood despite the Cullen family offering him a more virtuous path. The disregard of virtue character in contemporary children's literature is more devoid of virtue than the model of the Golden Age. This is most likely due to the sophistication of the audience that contemporary authors are writing for. Child readers today are more aware of the outside world and the nuances of right and wrong.

While much more study needs to be done on this emerging model, parents are already seeing that the new model is much more suited to the modern day child reader. Contemporary children's literature presents a "more flexible, more complex view of human relationships" (MacLeod *American Childhood* 215). Wendy Smith, after reading *Harry Potter* to her son, said "what impressed me was Rowling's refusal to simplify her characters for her young audience" (129). The best new authors of children's literature are able to combine "the golden-age authors' understanding that children look at the world differently with the chastened knowledge that our kids nonetheless live in the same troubled, perplexing world we do" (Smith 130). With the emergence of authors who are able to combine models of virtue with complex, entertaining story lines, there may soon be a second era in which children's books reign supreme. However, in order to learn all we can

from the Golden Age, and perhaps recreate its importance, we must first recognize the validity and study the patterns of the didactic models of teaching virtue that were employed during the era.

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VITA

Hillary Reyes was born in Houston, TX to Sberald and John Reyes in 1983. She was raised by her mother in Spring, TX and graduated from Spring High School. She continued her education at Texas A&M University-College Station with the help of a full academic scholarship from The Terry Foundation. Upon graduating from Texas A&M in 2005, she taught high school English at Westfield High School in her hometown. After a year, she decided to pursue her Masters in Literature at Texas State University-San Marcos. She is currently teaching high school English in the Lake Travis Independent School District in Austin, TX.

Permanent Address:

158 S. Queenscliff Circle
The Woodlands, TX 77382

This Manuscript was typed by Hillary S. Reyes

