

THE QUEST FOR A HOME: ACCULTURATION, SOCIAL FORMATIONS, AND
AGENCY IN BRITISH FICTION, 1816-1911

Dissertation Proposal

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The Quest for a Home: Acculturation, Social Formations, and Agency in British Fiction, 1816-1911

When Jane Austen, in Mansfield Park, has Sir Bertram send Fanny Price back to Portsmouth, Fanny has a moment of "rapture." ¶ The narrator states: "The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation."¹ This feeling, however, does not last long. Within three months, Austen has Fanny express an equally intense desire to call Mansfield home. While Claudia L. Johnson, in Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel, sees this incident teaching Fanny "to value the advantages of wealth and comfort Mansfield provides,"² I see something else at work. In placing Fanny between the "cultures" of Portsmouth and Mansfield, between her biological origins and social upbringing, Austen creates a space in which Fanny can belong to neither. Fanny's quest for a home does not only symbolize conservative or liberal politics, but also an attempt to find cultural standing.

I find that the figure of Fanny Price, caught between Mansfield and Portsmouth, represents a recurring feature in British fiction. ¶ Charles Dickens' Sissy Jupe, for instance, straddles the differing worlds of the Gradgrind household and the circus; Charles Kingsley's protagonist Tom morphs from human to "water-baby" to human again, while Rudyard Kipling's Kim transitions, with some anguish, from an Indian boy adept at living on the streets to an undercover British agent. Lewis Carroll's Alice wanders in bewilderment through Wonderland; G. A. Henty's Margaret Holland

Comment [# 1]: Proposal begins with a "hook," a specific textual example that engages the reader and introduces the key issue. (Beginning with a hook is an effective strategy, but is not necessary).

Comment [# 2]: Provides other examples to demonstrate that the issue at stake is widespread in novels of the period (i.e. not particular to the example in the hook).

¹ Jane Austen. Mansfield Park. NY: Norton, 1998, pp. 251-252.

² Ibid, p. 474.

seamlessly shifts between the cultures of her mixed heritage, and E. Nesbit's "railway children," dislocated from London, earnestly seek to return. The common factor between these different representations caught between opposed cultural and social groupings is what I term a process of acculturation, a mobility through which the authors show these metaphoric "homes" as either regained, formed anew, or lost. **III**

Andrew M. Coleman defines acculturation as "the process of assimilating the ideas, beliefs, customs, values and knowledge of another culture through direct contact with it, usually after migration from one place to another."³ **IV** This teen may seem out of place in the context of the quiet, familial situations of Fanny Price or Sissy Jupe. While Austen and Dickens do not present migrations across nations, there are well-defined and differing cultures at play in the modest domestic settings of Mansfield Park and Hard Times. Austen and Dickens create a metaphoric exile through the physical and emotional translocations of Fanny and Sissy. Both of these female characters are moved to new homes because of economic necessity, and Austen and Dickens show that these characters' basic needs are quite generously met in food, clothing, and even education. The dominant cultures of the Bertram and Gradgrind households also demand assimilation, but this process occurs in unforeseen ways. The characters of both Fanny Price and Sissy Jupe show a degree of acculturation to their new "homes," enough to separate them from their original homes of Portsmouth and the circus, yet they still do not "belong" to these households; there is still a strong element of alienation. Austen and Dickens use both characters as a "moral compass," and a process of reverse acculturation occurs; instead of having the resettled characters become acculturated to the dominant social households, the dominant social forms, to survive, have to acculturate themselves

Comment [# 3]: Introduces the term "acculturation," indicating that the writer will deal centrally with this concept in the proposed dissertation.

Comment [# 4]: Defines this key term and demonstrates in more detail its relevance to two important novels. Because "acculturation" comes from psychology/behavioral studies, the dissertation can be considered interdisciplinary.

³ Andrew M. Colman. A Dictionary of Psychology. Second Edition. London, NY: OUP, 2006.

to the principles of these characters. In these two instances, acculturation is counter-cultural; instead of the isolated and powerless subjects of Fanny and Sissy becoming acculturated, they become the ideals to which their respective communities should become acculturated.⁴

I have treated Austen and Dickens at some length to explain the process of acculturation that I see at work in British fiction of this period.  Acculturation takes various forms in the works I will be examining: it can be a course of action that changes the dominant social order as seen in Mansfield Park and Hard Times, a principle that creates a new subject, as I will argue in The Water-Babies and The Tiger of Mysore, or a factor that can either strengthen or loosen ties to a culture, as I see occurring in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and The Railway Children. In Kim, acculturation involves pain and never seems to bring resolution for the individual, whereas in The Secret Garden, I see Burnett employing it as a healing factor for the individual from a multitude of physical and psychological ills. However, acculturation in almost all of these instances leads to either a new or reconstituted social composition, a real or metaphoric "home," at the end of each work. Because acculturation is seen in both canonical and non-canonical works, and because as a process it grapples with larger issues of industrialization, science, theology, and empire, I feel that it adds to our understanding of some critical paradigms with which we normally view such 19th-century concerns. By

Comment [# 5]: Broadens the scope of key term. The writer acknowledges that earlier literary scholarship has anticipated a small part of the claim, but argues that analyzing the phenomenon in terms of acculturation will reveal its significance; the dissertation will thus be an original contribution to scholarship.

⁴ In the field of psychology, acculturation is associated with behavioral modification, which comes under the umbrella of the discipline of behavioral studies. Behavioral studies sees behavioral modification as a learned process in which the environment plays a prominent role. Behavioral studies examines overt and covert behavior, and repeated behavioral patterns occur either through learning from repeated stimuli or the knowledge of prior consequences from a stimulus. Although I am not going to examine acculturation from a psychological basis, I find the terms this discipline utilizes helpful in analyzing this repeated literary theme. For instance, Dickens has Gradgrind tout the virtues of learned behavior and has him view Sissy as an experiment in progress. This experiment "fails," but it is this failure that Dickens uses to change Gradgrind's own pattern of learned behavior.

making this statement, I am not saying that my reading of Austen and Dickens bringing an unexpected resolution through Fanny and Sissy is new; critical appreciation of Mansfield Park and Hard Times has already established that. However, I do believe that analyzing the process that brings about these resolutions as one of acculturation adds to our understanding of these canonical texts and also of the non-canonical works I will be examining. The idea of cultural dislocation, translocation, and exile seen both in the domestic realm and in the larger contexts of science, industrialization, and empire leads to a quest for a home that results in re-formed social compositions. This aspect, while loosely identified in some of these texts, has not had critical attention as a recurrent theme. Because acculturation reveals agency both in the domestic order and in larger social frameworks, it becomes an important phenomenon when it occurs in these different paradigms My dissertation will contribute to scholarship in this area.

Chapter One will deal with Jane Austen's Mansfield Park (1816) and Charles Dickens' Hard Times (1854). **VI** Scholarship notes how both these novels raise larger social concerns. Scholars such as Lionel Trilling, Marilyn Butler, Alistair Duckworth, and Claudia Johnson, while coming to different conclusions, see Austen critiquing the landed upper class, while critics such as Catherine Gallagher, Cynthia Northcutt Malone, and John R. Harrison point out that Dickens consistently attacks utilitarianism. Such scholarship usually connects the female domestic agency of Fanny Price and Sissy Jupe to these social concerns. I have already noted that this scholarship fails to address the commonality that Fanny and Sissy share in bringing about reverse acculturation. In further exploring this dimension, I would like to examine how this "domestic" form of acculturation connects itself to larger contexts such as empire. When Edward Said reads

Comment [# 6]: Describes argument of Chapter One, noting relevant earlier scholarship. (Note that the chapter descriptions are very detailed, each about a page long. Other proposals might have a longer introductory argument, discussing previous scholarship, and then briefer chapter descriptions.)

the "silence" of Mansfield Park on empire as an extremely voluble statement, he fails to take in to account the microcosm of cultural maneuvering that occurs in the novel and the larger import this mobility has for social change. Anne McClintock, in Imperial Leather, makes a compelling case of how domestic views of gender and race created imperial views. I wish to raise similar questions, not of gender and race, but of the impact of "domestic" acculturation in larger arenas.

In the second chapter, I will examine the process of acculturation in two canonical children's texts that follow closely on the heels of Mansfield Park and Hard Times. **VII** Charles Kingsley's The Water-Babies (1863) and Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865). Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews offer an interesting critical position which is useful in understanding ideological positions in children's literature. Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews suggest that "Play is a politics—it inculcates gender, class, ethnicity, and their attendant codes of social behavior."⁵ For the most part of its history, adults have written children's literature, and because adults have seen children as needing nurture and instruction (though what kind of nurture and instruction is consistently under debate) a strong didactic element is present in children's literature. Looking at acculturation from this perspective, what an author wants children to become acculturated to becomes vitally important. In The Water-Babies, Kingsley depicts a purposeful, scientific and religious acculturation of his main character. Tom, the water-baby, is caught between the life of a chimney sweep and the purity of the life that the little girl Ellie symbolizes. In order to achieve the latter state, Kingsley has Tom go through a spiritual evolution and then rewards him with a career as a scientist. As a biological

Comment [# 7]: Describes argument of Chapter Two, again in context of previous scholarship.

⁵ Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews. "History and the Politics of Play in T. S. Eliot's 'The Burial of the Dead' and Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons." The Lion and the Unicorn 14 (1990):53-69.

exile, Tom obtains his new home only when he becomes acculturated to the moral universe that Kingsley provides. While critics such as Gillian Beer, Colin Manlove, and Charles Muller have discussed Kingsley's religious and scientific beliefs and linked these beliefs to larger issues of Darwinism and industrialism, they have not examined the deep desire the protagonist, Tom, shows for cultural stability. As a chimney sweep, Tom longs for a better life, and as a water-baby, although Tom enjoys the experiences that come his way, he consistently displays an eagerness to join Ellie in her human realm. Kingsley displays this pursuit of stability as achieved through physical and spiritual mobility. It is Tom's ability to adapt, to acculturate himself, that finally achieves this end. In contrast, Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland shows a desperate and failed attempt to acculturate to new surroundings. Although Carroll has Alice venture on a search for stability in her rapidly changing environment, the only resolution he provides is her awakening from a dream state. Scholars have frequently pointed out that Carroll's interest in mathematics spills over into this children's book. Wonderland could not be more dissimilar to Kingsley's deterministic and very familiar universe, yet both these authors send their characters off on a journey of acculturation. In the larger contexts of science and religion, both these narratives offer strikingly different perspectives. Through Tom, Kingsley offers a new subject, a biologically and spiritually evolved subject in a purposeful world. Carroll, on the other hand, offers the figure of child unable to find a meaningful or stable world.

Chapter Three will focus on the role of acculturation in colonial contexts. **VIII**
 The introduction of empire brings in cross-cultural relations. Instead of domestic translocations, biological morphing, or falling into dream worlds, geographical migration

Comment [# 8]: Describes argument of Chapter Three, again in context of previous scholarship.

comes into play. The two books I will be discussing in this chapter are G. A. Henty's The Tiger of Mysore (1895) and Rudyard Kipling's Kim (1901). Henty's characters Margaret and Dick Holland (mother and son) show a natural and unforced quality of being both English and Indian. Margaret, half-Indian, half-English, comfortable in either culture of her mixed parentage, marries across class and culture and takes an active and positive role throughout the narrative. Through Margaret's ease at living in either England or India, Henty indicates a high level of acculturation to both these cultures. The scholarship that focuses on Henty, almost without variance, appraises him as an imperialist and sexist who had the potential of inculcating such values to his child audience.⁶ Scholars, however, have failed to see the nuance in Henty's portrayal of Margaret as a subject, a subject whose Indian blood is valued and who can consider India her home. I will argue that with Margaret, a new colonial subject emerges. Kipling's Kim, on the other hand, shows an equally intense acculturation to sharply differing cultures in his effortless ability to be both English and Indian, but displays anguish in this state of acculturation. In Kipling's depiction of this conflict, Kim wants to get on with the British "great [colonial] game" but also wants to fulfill his personal desires, which lean more toward his Indian ways, best seen in his affectionate relationship with the Lama and Kim's comfort in Indian clothes. Acculturation remains a dynamic process in these two works; the social formations that they point to are dynamic and instable, not rooted to any particular land or culture, the consequences of empire. I will argue that while in the figure of Kim

⁶ Jeffrey Richards sees Henty as representative of the imperialistic doctrines and dogmas of his age which he introduced to his child audience. Gail S. Clark discusses Henty's ability to distinguish between cultures but always sees him as viewing the English as superior. David J. Lorenzo argues that Henty's depiction of boy heroes was a justification of empire. Brook Allen commends Henty for the historical information he provides to his child audience, but sees his poor literary quality and jingoistic values as harmful for modern-day audiences (Henty is currently popular with home-schoolers).

there is no resolution, or at the best ambiguity, to the working out of acculturation in the context of empire (similar to the impossibility of Alice becoming acculturated in Wonderland), in the figure of Margaret Holland the reader can see the emergence of a new type of colonial subject — a subject that can stand by the new biological subject of Tom from The Water-Babies.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will examine (in contrast to the "rootlessness" of narratives such as The Tiger of Mysore and Kim) narratives that reveal how the process of acculturation can create strong ties to particular locations. ~~IX~~ Edith Nesbit, in The Railway Children (1906), favors an urban location (and the industrial symbol of the railway, albeit a sanitized symbol) over a rural location. Frances Hodgson Burnett, in The Secret Garden (1911), privileges the English countryside over its Indian counterpart to such an extent that, I would argue, in this case the land itself gains agency. Nesbit so acculturates her characters to London that although she depicts them as quite happy in the countryside, they always yearn for their former lifestyle. The mobility of the railway, in its power to transport the children between favored and less favorable locations in the narrative, symbolizes acculturation; the children, after all, are the railway children. Yet despite all the travel in the story, Nesbit shows that the fixed location of London has immense agency, best seen in the multiple protagonists' unanimous desire to return to the city and its suburbs. Although scholars such as Amelia A. Rutledge, Julia Briggs, Shirley Foster, Judy Simons have criticized Nesbit for failing to reflect her public feminist and socialist beliefs in her writing, this criticism does not take into account the type of agency seen in The Railway Children. In The Secret Garden, Burnett takes this agency of location to even greater extremes. The protagonists, Mary and Colin, require both

Comment [# 9]: Describes argument of Chapter Four, again in context of previous scholarship.

physical healing and something to fix the disagreeableness of their personalities, and to these twin requirements, Burnett offers the power of the English moors and its climate. Burnett acculturates her characters through the land and the wind; fresh air and physical activity bring them good health, restored personalities, and familial reconciliation. The "wholesome" characters of Dickon and Martha that Burnett depicts already show a high level of acculturation to their physical environment. Again, I believe the critical attention that Burnett has received overlooks this crucial aspect of acculturation. Although neither of these works directly raise questions about science or theology, I do see them as connected to The Water-Babies and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in the concerns that they raise over mobility. The industrial mechanized world is as acceptable to Nesbit as it was to Kingsley, only her metaphor for it, the railway, differs from his mechanized natural world. While Burnett clearly has a romanticized view of nature, she raises the dangers of mobility and translocation in a manner similar to Carroll's. Whereas Carroll offers no resolution, Burnett demands stability and constructs it through acculturation to the land.

My dissertation, by examining this single process of acculturation in the different ways it plays out in British fiction of this period, adds to our understanding of these texts. I also believe that in the larger contexts of critical paradigms, whether postcolonial, feminist, or cultural, my dissertation will add a new component to the established discourse. ❌

I would like to request the following faculty members to serve on my committee: Dr. Patricia Michaelson (Chair), Dr. Sean Cotter, Dr. Pamela Gossin, and Dr. Michael Wilson.

Comment [# 10]: Claims dissertation will add to the on-going scholarly conversation. (Because this argument was made earlier, it is only briefly stated here; this paragraph could have been more substantial.)

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