Children's Literature as Transatlantic Enterprise

We continue our exploration of transatlantic reading with children's literature in two notable examples blending transatlantic authorial travels, cultural exchange, and celebrity. Our first text, 1888's "The Happy Prince," comes from Oscar Wilde. We'll also be reading Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, which began its serialization in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in November 1885 and became a transatlantic bestseller after its publication in book form in 1886. The novel inspired a long-running transatlantic play (*The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy*) that debuted in both New York and London in 1888. Burnett's text also entered cultural memory through popular films, so we'll end our work in class by looking at clips of selected film versions.

OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Wilde came to America in 1882 (when among other places in Texas he lectured in Fort Worth). He was recruited by Richard D'Oyly Carte, the producer of Gilbert & Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*, to undertake a lecture tour that would promote the operetta (which had opened in New York in September 1881) just as the operetta would publicize Wilde's tour. As context for examining Wilde in transatlantic context, we'll discuss the *Philadelphia Press* interview with Wilde on 17 January 1882, from *Oscar Wilde in America: The Interviews*, ed. Matthew Hofer and Gary Scharnhorst (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2010), in which he discusses America in relation to England, fashion, and art (including poetry).

Wilde did not wear his hair long before or after his American tour. For that tour, importantly, he not only grew long hair but also donned velvet jacket, breeches, black silk stockings, and patent leather shoes (as well as a massive fur coat on occasions) to exemplify his role as the apostle of aestheticism. The publicity stills by Napoleon Sarony taken at the beginning of Wilde's tour in January 1882 helped fix the image of the British aesthetic poet.

See http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oscar_Wilde_by_Napoleon_Sarony.jpg); for more images of Wilde see what purports to be the official Oscar Wilde site http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/photo.htm).

Later, in Washington DC, Oscar Wilde met Frances Hodgson Burnett, who was already well established as a writer in America. And this is one of the transatlantic links in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, since she later began to dress her own sons Lionel and Vivian in velvet suits and stockings, reminiscent of Wilde's American self-presentations. A performance of aesthetic masculinity by Wilde involving fashion thus had an impact on boys' fashion in the U.S. and on Burnett's novel, which in turn publicized this boys' fashion by circulating it transatlantically. A 5 December 1949 issue of *Life* magazine continued to keep alive the link between Oscar Wilde's transatlantic lecture tour, Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1886 novel, and child actors playing the

role of Little Lord Fauntleroy on stage. You can view the photo spread at this address on googlebooks:

http://books.google.com/books?id=VkEEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA71&lpg=PA71&dq=oscar+wilde+little+lord+fauntleroy&source=bl&ots=tlZitc4xZ1&sig=03oFc3itQmTj312UCxSehu4GwNc&hl=en&ei=gwfsTMqMJIT78AbJp5Bg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CBoQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=oscar%20wilde%20little%20lord%20fauntleroy&f=false

Questions to keep in mind as you read the Wilde materials:

1. The interview of Wilde is mediated in every sense; he is playing a role, and the press is profiling a visiting celebrity. Within this context, how are both parties, the press and the poet, shaping transatlantic attitudes and responding to shared and divergent cultural elements in the U.S. and Britain?
2. "The Happy Prince" appeared after the immense success of Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Does Wilde's tale share any strategies, values, or purposes with Burnett's tale? To ask this in another way, to what degree does the tale entrench, respond to, or critique British, Irish, and/or American attitudes, assumption, or investments?

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Burnett was born a year after the publication of *Mary Barton* in the same city where Gaskell resided, Manchester, to a middle-class businessman and a mother of genteel descent. Her father died when Frances Hodgson was 5, and though her mother at first sustained the family business, the American Civil War doomed the enterprise since so much of Manchester's prosperity and manufacture withered due to the blockade of cotton imports and other transatlantic trade. Since her brother had already settled in Tennessee, the family joined him there when Frances was 16. Hodgson began publishing stories early on and won great success with her novel *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877). By then she had married physician Swan Burnett in 1873 and lived in Washington, DC, and it was owing to her literary prominence that Oscar Wilde met her in 1882.

Burnett, then, was another transatlantic resident (like Susanna Rowson or Henry James). Moreover, we've already indicated that Oscar Wilde's American tour played a role in her representation of the transatlantic boy Cedric Errol, later Lord Fauntleroy. She traced the character of Cedric directly to her son Vivian, whose photograph you can see in *Life* magazine through the above link or in the photograph below (from Katherine L. Carlson, "Little Lord Fauntleroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3.1 [2010]: 39-64), which she sent to illustrator Reginal Birch in the summer of 1885 as a guide to his depiction of Cedric.

If an American boy and an Anglo-Irish writer helped shape the novel, so did transatlantic literary precedents. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* has been traced to the sentiment and social reform of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and also to the "old-fashioned" Paul Dombey, a boy who similarly educates and reforms an adult's hardened heart in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-48). Since little Paul Dombey dies as a child before his father's reform is complete, this may be one reason that the serial novel's readers worried over what would become of Cedric. In "'The Best Magazine for Children of all Ages': Cross-Editing *St. Nicholas' Magazine* (1873-1905)" (in *Children's Literature* 25 [1997]: 153-80), Susan R. Gannon reprints several letters to the editor Mary Mapes Dodge (168-69), including one that recognized the resemblance of Cedric to Paul Dombey and others that expressed anxiety over Cedric's fate. (This article is available through Project Muse).

Since gender roles played an important role in responses to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is worth remembering that it was usual for toddlers, male and female alike to wear long clothes, as in this childhood photograph of Oscar Wilde:

Even on the American frontier, it was "normal" for young boys to wear what would have been viewed as gender-neutral dresses and to have long hair. Here, for instance, is a photograph from the pioneering days of Kansas settlement:

From the archive's records: "Ada McColl gathering buffalo chips. The photo was taken by her mother in 1893. Ada is with her brother Bert (wearing dress). TX.2*5 (uncropped). Kansas State Historical Society. Topeka, KS."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning also deliberately kept her son Pen in long hair and pantaloons as long as she lived in resistance to then-conventional gender roles (see below). Almost immediately after her death in 1861, Robert had his son's hair cut and dressed Pen in trousers. In America, very long clothing indistinguishable from girls' dresses was common for male children, at least among toddlers.

Pen Browning with Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Vivian Burnett

In "Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation," an essay published in *American Literary History* (Vol. 8, No. 2 [Summer, 1996],

pp. 232-258), Anna Wilson offers this commentary on the popularity of Lord Fauntleroy—both the book and the image—in the late 19th century:

> "*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…. When the book was adapted for the stage and performed first in London and then in New York in 1888, the Fauntleroy phenomenon took on new, intensified attributes: as a result of the triumphant stage performances, Fauntleroy merchandizing spin-offs were produced, including not only the notorious velvet and lace suits for boys' wear but also dolls, candy, playing cards, and perfume. Only Lewis Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880) was in more libraries by 1893; reader polls consistently put *Little Lord Fauntleroy* among the top 10 books for children; and the suit spread by dint of visual example wherever families came into contact with one another-the poor and the provincial copied the fashion from upper-middle-class urban families at such opportunities for the spread of fashion as the 1893 Chicago World's Fair" (235)

It is *LF*'s "look" that claims much of Wilson's attention. As indicated above, she links the popularity of the character—and the fad of dressing up young boys to replicate his appearance—to both illustrations and spin-offs, including fashionable clothing. She also points out that, on the flip side of the fad encouraging the use of a Fauntleroy "look" in boys' clothing, there was also a backlash. Notes Wilson:

> "Two traditions of response to Burnett's most famous and commercial work can be traced: loathing and apologia. In the first of these, Little Lord Fauntleroy figures as a contagious disease—'The Fauntleroy Plague' (Beffel 133): 'It ran through England like a sickly fever. Nine editions were published in as many months, and the odious little prig in the lace collar is not dead yet' (Darton 239). Apologists defend Burnett and her creation by returning to the text, distinguishing between the received, popular image of the 'sissy' and the textual original. Burnett's most recent biographer, for instance, claims 'Lord Fauntleroy was, in fact, no sissy.... He is brave, enterprising, adaptable and unaffected. He is, in fact, a likeable boy'" (Thwaite 91; emphasis added).

Wilson also links the long-lived antagonism toward Fauntleroy to the illustrations that were quickly associated, in a range of published versions, with the text's impact:

> "Much critical antagonism has been directed at [book illustrator] Birch for 'sissifying' Fauntleroy, the argument being that without these sentimental illustrations Fauntleroy's essential masculine qualities (bravery, ability to run fast) would have been sufficient to save him from the hatred of generations. Little Lord Fauntleroy, they want to say, is the natural boy underneath. I propose to argue here, however, that in fact Birch renders

visually a latent presence in the text: rather than just a boy rendered girlish, little Lord Fauntleroy represents a boy functioning as a female substitute. This position renders him attractive to some readers and loathsome to others; it is also this anomalous gendering that makes his reiterated image in the form of the Fauntleroy suit so powerful a focus of both derision and desire in popular culture" (234-35).

Wilson links some changes in the characterization of Fauntleroy in various film versions of the text (which we'll sample in class) with American anxiety over the version of endangered masculinity that came to be associated with the text. She notes: "Little Lord Fauntleroy's insufficient masculinity has …been addressed in a variety of ways: as a disease to be wiped out, as an inessential covering that a return to authenticity will correct, or as a period oddity that can appropriately be excised for more modern audiences. These stratagems are also concerned to deal with another order of problem, however indirectly—the girlish boy's enormous popularity. Fauntleroy's effeminacy would present no great difficulty if it were not precisely this version of him, the little boy with the long golden curls wearing the velvet suit with the lace collar, that captured the public imagination" (236).

For Wilson herself, "the cult of Fauntleroy can be understood as a reassertion of sentimental power, that the suit in fact represents an attempt to inscribe feminine values in the public sphere. Fauntleroy, in other words, is a stalking horse, an attempt to take the domestic out into the world, enabling it to operate outside its given sphere. Responses to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as a consumerist plague can also be seen as both a reassertion of masculine discourse in the public sphere and as part of high culture's enduring battle to distinguish itself from a feminized popular culture and hence from a culture of consumption" (236). [1]

TCU's Special Collections and the "Juvenile Library" collection hold several special US editions of the narrative, including one from 1886, one from 1924, and another from 1954.

Questions to keep in mind as you read Little Lord Fauntleroy:

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[1] It's perhaps worth noting that the publication of Wilson's essay in *American Literary History* helped signal the rising position of scholarship on children's literature and culture in American Studies. More recent milestones in this ongoing process include the release of an influential collection of essays edited by Caroline Levander and Carol. J. Singley--*The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*. Rutgers U Press, 2003—as well as monographs by Levander and Karen Sanchez-Eppler: Levander's *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. Du Bois*. Durham: Duke U Press, 2006 and Sanchez-Eppler's *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2005.

1. What is your own gender analysis of Lord Fauntleroy? What do you see Burnett trying to do with representations of boyhood in Cedric?

2. Similarly, how is she representing motherhood and femininity? Give particular consideration here to "Dearest" but also to Minnie as exemplars of American identity and femininity. [Be sure to pay close attention to Minnie's origins and consider their significance.]

3. How does Burnett's transatlantic focus affect representations of class both in America and Britain? To what degree is the novel leveling or entrenching class distinctions in both countries? To what degree, for example, does the novel serve to chasten aristocracy or, contrarily, to intensify transatlantic desire for an aristocratic lifestyle? Does the novel suggest the value of disrupting entrenched class hierarchies in England or importing American forms of governance?

4. What larger attitudes toward America and Britain does the novel elicit and/or reinforce?

5, Burnett and *St. Nicholas Magazine* alike are claimed by British and American national traditions: Burnett is dually-listed in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* as a British and as an American writer; *St. Nicholas Magazine* can be found both in the American Periodical Series database and 19th century U.K. periodicals (though only from 1873-1884 in the latter). Is this an American novel, a British novel, or an inherently transatlantic novel?

6. We're looking at film clips at the end of the period. But we also encourage you to do a material analysis of the textbook we ordered for the class. The illustrations in this edition are close to original depictions of Cedric, but not exactly so. (We include one *St. Nicholas* image below; you can further compare our textbook to the original illustrations by looking at *St. Nicholas* in APS or at the googlebooks link below; in the latter you can find installments beginning on pp. 564, 646, and 734: http://books.google.com/books?id=n7NNAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA954&lpg=PA954&dq=st+nicholas+little+lord+fauntleroy&source=bl&ots=foHx9xI2CI&sig=qIncQq3WDqAWChZ1qgrqRZQoWmk&hl=en&ei=ofjrTOjMEML_lgf8pvSsAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=st%20nicholas%20little%20lord%20fauntleroy&f=false)

How are class, gender, and cultural difference encoded in the illustrations? What pattern do you see in the scenes singled out for upmarket color illustrations as opposed to cheaper black and white work?