

New Thought and the Inner Child in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*

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ONE of the most recognizable pop-culture tropes of the late twentieth century was the inner child, an idea that has been a cornerstone of self-help culture, twelve-step groups, and influential forms of psychotherapy from the 1970s to the present day.¹ In these contexts, the inner child represents a person's original or true self. This inner self is sometimes called the "Imago Dei," the "I Am," or the "Divine Child," indicating a spiritual dimension.² It is likewise a repository of wisdom, creativity, and authenticity that can lead its adult counterpart to happiness and prosperity. But this divine being can also be terribly damaged. Books on the subject often speak of a "wounded inner child" that must be

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¹ Transactional analysis, object relations theory, and Internal Family Systems therapy all include inner child work.

² See John Bradshaw, *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* (New York: Bantam, 1990), pp. 264, 177; and Charles L. Whitfield, *Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1987, 2006), p. 9.

reparented to heal past trauma, thus freeing up the energies of the authentic self.

In therapeutic contexts, the existence of the inner child and its psychological significance are seldom questioned; in popular culture, however, the inner child has been frequently ridiculed. For instance, Wendy Kaminer's critique of the recovery movement, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional* (1992), states that "inside every addict is a holy child yearning to be free"—an assertion that blurs the line between mockery and accurate representation of inner child theory.³ Meanwhile, former U.S. Senator and sketch comedian Al Franken's book *I'm Good Enough, I'm Smart Enough, and Doggone It, People Like Me!* (1992)—written in the voice of his *Saturday Night Live* character Stuart Smalley, a "caring nurturer and a member of several twelve-step programs"—describes Stuart appealing his inner child by writing about dysfunctional forest animals.⁴

As these examples show, the inner child can be easily dismissed as a symptom of New Age goofiness or navel-gazing narcissism.⁵ Perhaps this is why there have been few, if any, scholarly attempts to provide the inner child with an intellectual genealogy. Kaminer's description of "inner child theory" as an "eclectic blend of Jung, New Age mysticism, holy child mythology, pop psychology, and psychoanalytic theories about narcissism" provides some helpful clues, but it oversimplifies the many cultural trends that coalesce in this figure (*I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional*, p. 17).

Self-help writers provide even less context, preferring to represent the inner child as timeless. Physician Charles Whitfield, whose *Healing the Child Within* (1987) sold over one million copies, offers a characteristically imprecise history:

³ Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 19.

⁴ Al Franken, *I'm Good Enough, I'm Smart Enough, and Doggone It, People Like Me! Daily Affirmations by Stuart Smalley* (New York: Dell, 1992), n.p.

⁵ The term "New Age" refers to a loosely organized group of spiritual seekers who hoped to usher in a "new universal religion" based on "the development of a mystical consciousness or awareness." The New Age movement began in Britain in the 1960s and peaked in North America in the 1980s. See "Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age Family," in J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 7th ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), p. 160.

The concept of the Child Within has been a part of our world culture for at least two thousand years. Carl Jung called it the “Divine Child” and Emmet Fox called it the “Wonder Child.” Psychotherapists Alice Miller and Donald Winnicott refer to it as the “true self.” Many in the field of alcoholism and other chemical dependence call it the “inner child.” (*Healing the Child Within*, p. 1)

While Whitfield provides some leads (pointing, for instance, toward Jungian psychoanalysis, mid-twentieth-century psychological studies of child abuse, and twelve-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous), he leaves certain details tantalizingly vague, such as where the inner child originated two thousand years ago. Is he referring to the Christ Child? Or perhaps to a classical source? These and other facts remain unclear. Therapist and motivational speaker John Bradshaw, whose book *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing the Inner Child* (1990) spent fifty-two weeks near the top of the *New York Times Bestseller List* and who appeared on television shows such as *Oprah*, *Geraldo*, and *Good Morning America*, says even less about the history of this figure. Bradshaw’s book on the inner child was so popular, in fact, that he was sometimes wrongly assumed to have invented the concept.⁶ More recently, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, in *Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child* (2010), contextualizes the inner child within a range of Asian religious teachings, though Nhat Hanh does not substantially challenge the basic tenets of the concept outlined in earlier writings.⁷

In this essay, I provide a more detailed genealogy of the inner child. While I discuss various literary, philosophical, and religious antecedents for this figure, my focus is the nineteenth-century new religious movement known as New Thought. New Thought was founded in late-nineteenth-century New England by mesmerist Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866) and his students Julius and Annetta Dresser, Warren Felt Evans, and Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), who touted positive thinking,

⁶ See William Grimes, “John Bradshaw, Self-Help Evangelist Who Called to the ‘Inner Child,’ Dies at 82,” *New York Times*, 12 May 2016, n.p.

⁷ See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child* (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 2010).

meditation, and daily affirmations as a means to health, wealth, and happiness. This movement, sometimes called “mind cure,” taught that thoughts were things with power to change the world. Dwelling on positive thoughts or uplifting words could supposedly bring about desired changes, while negative thinking could allegedly cause sickness, poverty, and other catastrophic outcomes. In the nineteenth century, New Thought practitioners were perhaps best known for treating illness through prayer. The most visible branch of this movement was Eddy’s Christian Science, founded in 1879. Christian Science was more hierarchical than most New Thought sects and took a stronger stance against mainstream medicine.⁸ But Eddy’s religion shared New Thought’s emphasis on mind over matter—that is, the idea that the spirit triumphs over the physical body.

Today, aspects of New Thought survive in corporate culture, twelve-step groups, psychotherapy, fitness fads, prosperity gospel, alternative health care, and popular entertainment, as historians such as Anne Harrington and Barbara Ehrenreich have discussed.⁹ Because New Thought pervades these secular contexts, we tend to forget that it was once a more cohesive religious movement that appealed to women, invalids, and those who rejected the fire-and-brimstone Calvinism of mainstream Protestant sects. William James, for instance, famously called “mind-cure” in its various forms “the religion of healthy-

⁸ On other differences between Christian Science and New Thought, see Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875–1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1999), pp. 4–6; and Charles S. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion: The Rise and Development of New Thought* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1963, 1977), pp. 14–22.

⁹ On New Thought’s impact on psychotherapy, see Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2008), pp. 103–38, and Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1995), pp. 117–39; on corporate culture, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (New York: Henry Hill & Co., 2009), pp. 97–122; on diet fads, see R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2004), pp. 110–59; on prosperity gospel and televangelism, see Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013); on entertainment, see Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 229–64.

mindedness” because it fostered feelings of “courage, hope, and trust.”¹⁰ New Thought and Christian Science attracted countless followers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with their upbeat approaches to spirituality, health, and material prosperity.¹¹

In the first half of this essay, I show how Mary Baker Eddy, her onetime student Emma Curtis Hopkins (1849–1925), and other New Thought writers adapted British Romantic attitudes toward childhood in ways that shaped the modern inner child. In the second half, I turn to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), a blockbuster romance by British-born American author Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924). This novel exemplifies how the inner child mediates between idealized young people and adult desires. Burnett, a onetime student of Christian Science, influenced the inner child as it appeared in New Thought writing of the period, thus paving the way for twentieth- and twenty-first-century incarnations of this figure.

Throughout, I consider the uses of the inner child for nineteenth-century New Thought enthusiasts and modern proponents of the recovery movement alike. Historically, the inner child has greater significance for women, who made up the bulk of early New Thought followers and remain the primary demographic targeted by self-help literature.¹² Yet the inner child is hardly feminist in a traditional sense. In *The Culture of Recovery* (1996), for instance, Elayne Rapping describes the movement as apolitical at best, reactionary at worst.¹³ Within recovery culture, battered wives, rape survivors, and victims

¹⁰ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), in his *Writings, 1902–1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: The Library of America, 1987), p. 91.

¹¹ Christian Science peaked at 269,000 members in 1936 (Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 5). New Thought followers were far more numerous, but precise numbers are unavailable due to the diffuse nature of the movement.

¹² Historian Beryl Satter emphasizes that “the majority of late-nineteenth-century New Thought authors, healers, teachers, patients, and congregants were white middle-class women” (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 8). A 2017 study, meanwhile, suggests that about 83% of readers of self-help books online are female (see Youyou Zhou, “Goodreads Data Show that Women Reading Self-Help Books Are Getting Advice from Men,” *Quartz*, 4 November 2017; available online at <qz.com>).

¹³ See Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery: Making Sense of the Self-Help Movement in Women’s Lives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 7.

of race and class prejudice are urged to heal their inner children rather than seek legal or political redress (Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery*, pp. 41–42). Inner child therapy thus seemingly forecloses avenues for activism and consciousness raising. The figure of the wounded inner child might also appear to reify patriarchal assumptions about similarities between women and children.

Why, then, have so many women embraced the inner child, from the late nineteenth century to the present? The writings of Eddy, Hopkins, and Burnett help make sense of this phenomenon. Their works suggest that female New Thought followers needed to visualize themselves as children—often, though not always, as male children—to justify self-care and career pursuits. The inner child might be construed as the feminine counterpart to a dynamic described by Catherine Robson, in which male authors such as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, and John Ruskin penned literature idealizing middle-class girl children.¹⁴ For such men, middle-class girls symbolized a return to the peaceful domestic realm of the nursery, where young boys of this class were raised alongside their sisters until they were sent to public schools. Girls and girlhood thus represented “the true essence of childhood” as well as a retreat from the competitive environments of public schools, universities, and careers (Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 3).

For women, the usually masculine inner child represented a different kind of escape, one that enabled conditional entry into male-dominated realms. The inner child was useful to such women precisely *because* it did not obviously challenge the political or economic status quo. By cloaking personal ambition in saccharine imagery of domesticity and childhood, women of the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries could more easily inhabit positions of authority normally held by men. Eddy’s leadership of her Christian Science Mother Church serves as an important case in point, as I explain in the next section. Women could also justify self-indulgent behavior by

¹⁴ See Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), p. 3. Robson suggests that while this dynamic could involve an element of pedophilia—as in Carroll’s *Alice* books—it was not primarily sexual in nature.

blaming it on their inner child. In a 1902 diary entry, for instance, Canadian writer Lucy Maud Montgomery attributes her taste for sweets and novel-reading to her “inner girl”—in a comparatively rare, but not isolated, example of a same-sex child being put to the same use.¹⁵ These examples hint at the many functions of the inner child adeptly modeled in Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and embraced in recent popular culture. They also point to a problem that contemporary feminism has yet to solve: the guilt that many women feel when putting their own needs and ambitions first.



To be sure, New Thought is not the only relevant source for the inner child. This figure has a surprisingly long history, extending from classical antiquity to the present. One of the earliest examples comes from Plato’s *Phaedo* (360 B.C.E.), which mentions a “child within us” who “fear[s] death as if it were a hobgoblin.”¹⁶ The Christ Child, meanwhile, has become “the primary inner symbol of the self in our times,” according to Jeremiah Abrams, paraphrasing Carl Jung.¹⁷

But the most important period in the formation of the inner child arguably began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when French philosophers and British Romantic poets alike turned to children as representatives of the divine. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth, and William Blake, for instance, saw children as closer to God and nature than their adult counterparts, a view best expressed in Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1807, 1815):

¹⁵ Lucy Maud Montgomery, *The Complete Journals of L.M. Montgomery: The PEI Years, 1901–1911*, ed. Mary Henley Rubio and Elizabeth Hillman Waterston (Don Mills, Canada: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), p. 46.

¹⁶ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Harold North Fowler, 12 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1914, 1966), I, 271, section 77e. Many thanks to David Ebrey for this reference.

¹⁷ Jeremiah Abrams, “Introduction,” in *Reclaiming the Inner Child*, ed. Abrams (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1990), p. 6. See also Carl Jung, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype” (1940), in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9, Part 1: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2d ed., ed. Herbert Read et al., trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 158.

Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!¹⁸

Victorians and Gilded Age Americans continued this idealizing trend with the literary cult of the child. As Marah Gubar explains, this “cult” refers to celebrated literary works by authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and J. M. Barrie in which children serve as “the epitome of attractiveness . . . transfixing—and often, humanizing—everyone they meet.”¹⁹

This literary vogue for idealized children influenced other disciplines, especially the work of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Jung’s 1940 essay “The Psychology of the Child Archetype”—particularly his idea of the “divine child” and “child hero” as structuring concepts of the psyche—crystalized some of these nineteenth-century ideas into a distinct philosophy. Jung also deserves credit for performing the earliest clinical inner child work. As Donald A. Price relates, Jung happily used himself as a guinea pig: “[Jung] discovered that he himself had an inner child, and spent some period of time on his own in play therapy . . . building a complete village as a way to access the 11-year-old part of himself who played with blocks.”²⁰ This activity allegedly released Jung’s “extraordinary creative energies.”²¹

While idealized children abounded in nineteenth-century literature and influenced Jungian psychoanalysis, other psychology experts took a darker view of children’s nature. In nineteenth-century England and Continental Europe, Carolyn Steedman argues, the child gradually came to symbolize interior selfhood or personal history, including experiences of

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, “Ode,” in his *Poems in Two Volumes and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983), p. 273, ll. 62–66.

¹⁹ Marah Gubar, “The Cult of the Child Revisited: Making Fun of *Fauntleroy*,” in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Late Victorian into Modern*, ed. Laura Marcus et al. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), p. 399.

²⁰ Donald A. Price, “Inner Child Work: What Is Really Happening?” *Dissociation*, 9 (1996), 69.

²¹ Joyce C. Mills and Richard J. Crowley, *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986), p. 33; quoted in Price, “Inner Child Work,” p. 69.

victimization. This trend took shape in evolutionary discourse and the Victorian child study movement, but culminated in the work of Sigmund Freud. The Viennese psychoanalyst saw children as repositories of trauma whose real or fantasized seduction experiences shaped adult neuroses.²² These diverse literary and psychological developments, combined with changing social attitudes about middle-class childhood as a protected time of play and education, all contributed to the notion of the inner child as we currently understand it, but they cannot account for the entire history of this figure.²³

New Thought authors such as Eddy, Hopkins, and Burnett took the idealized child popular in nineteenth-century literature and emphasized the *relationality* of this figure—that is, the child’s potential impact on adults in need of spiritual uplift. In their works, idealized children ultimately benefit mothers by providing emotional support and helping them express their wishes in culturally acceptable ways. This dynamic is key to understanding the role of the inner child (or “Man Child,” as Hopkins called it) as expressed by Gilded Age New Thought writers.

While popular New Thought writer Emma Curtis Hopkins first described the so-called Man Child and its utility for adult women, Eddy’s religious writings paved the way for this development by exalting women, children, and maternity in ways that appealed to her largely feminine audiences. Eddy’s androgynous conception of the deity as “Father-Mother-God,” and her idea of the Virgin Mary as a prophet in her own right, are but two examples of this phenomenon.²⁴ As Claudia Stokes explains, Eddy’s public persona likewise reflected her lofty conceptions of maternity and childhood. Eddy’s followers often referred to her as “Mother,” and the religion’s Boston

²² See Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 84–88.

²³ On changing social attitudes toward children and childhood during the long nineteenth century, see, for instance, Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); and Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1962).

²⁴ See Claudia Stokes, *The Altar at Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 182.

headquarters was dubbed “the Mother Church” in honor of its leader (*The Altar at Home*, p. 182). There was even a “Mother’s Room” within the structure lovingly furnished by a group of Christian Scientist children. Though Eddy’s personal experience of motherhood was limited (she gave up her seven-year-old son, George, for adoption due to her ill health in 1851, and rarely saw him thereafter), she styled herself as a maternal figure to conform to sentimental models of womanhood popularized by mid-century writers such as Stowe, Alcott, and Susan Warner (Stokes, *The Altar at Home*, p. 183).

In keeping with her maternal persona, Eddy wrote frequently of her love for children. In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (first edition 1875)—called the “text-book” of Christian Science—Eddy described children as “the spiritual thoughts and representatives of Life, Truth, and Love” and lauded “their freedom from wrong and their receptiveness of right.”²⁵ In passages like these, Eddy’s attitude reflects the literary cult of the child as well as New Testament passages on children such as Mark 10:14, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God,” which was engraved on a stained-glass window of her Mother’s Room.²⁶

But despite Eddy’s idealization of motherhood and children, her writings suggest ambivalence about parenting. On the rare occasions when she offered advice on the subject, she recommended *less* maternal involvement in children’s lives. Eddy warned, for instance: “If parents create in their babes a desire for incessant amusement, to be always fed, rocked, tossed, or talked to, those parents should not, in after years, complain of their children’s fretfulness or frivolity” (*Science and Health*, p. 62). Eddy also gestured toward a utopian future without marriage and childbirth. Paraphrasing Mark 12:25, she wrote: “the time cometh of which Jesus spake, when he declared

²⁵ Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Writings of Mary Baker Eddy, 2000), pp. 582, 236. Further references are to this edition, unless otherwise noted, and appear in the text.

²⁶ Bible verses quoted in this essay come from the King James Version (known as the Authorized Version in Britain), as this was the translation of the Bible most widely available to nineteenth-century readers.

that in the resurrection there should be no more marrying nor giving in marriage, but man would be as the angels" (*Science and Health*, p. 64).²⁷

Detractors like Mark Twain and Georgine Milmine noticed the disconnect between such passages and Eddy's maternal posturing. Twain, for instance, wrote a series of scathing essays about Eddy between 1899 and 1907. One such piece pointed to the lavish furnishings of the Mother's Room as proof that Eddy was more interested in filthy lucre than motherly stewardship of her flock (Stokes, *The Altar at Home*, p. 214). More devastatingly, Milmine, whose scandalous exposé of Eddy's life ran in *McClure's Magazine* from 1907 to 1908, accused Eddy of abandoning her son George, to whom she allegedly showed a "curious aversion."²⁸ Eddy's later biographer, Gillian Gill, contests this assertion, arguing that Eddy's second husband prevented her from reuniting with her son.²⁹ Whatever the case, Eddy's detractors forced her to rethink her self-presentation. After 1903, the Christian Science Church by-laws were amended to "drop the word *mother* and to substitute Leader" when referring to Eddy.³⁰

Eddy's ambivalence about marriage and family life, however strongly decried, were hardly unique within her congregation. Historian Beryl Satter emphasizes that New Thought and Christian Science appealed to so-called New Women, a late-nineteenth-century term for women who embraced

²⁷ The 1889 revised edition of *Science and Health* contains a further, revealing passage: "Until it be learned that generation rests on no sexual basis, let marriage continue." This passage might seem to leave open the possibility that sexual reproduction will continue after the resurrection. But the surrounding text suggests otherwise, gesturing toward the "white-robed purity" of man's future state, in which "passion hath no part." Mary Baker G. Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 40th ed., revised (Boston: Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1889), p. 143.

²⁸ Willa Cather and Georgine Milmine, *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science* (1907–8; rpt. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 26. While this book has sometimes been attributed to Willa Cather as well as Georgine Milmine, recent scholarship suggests that Cather's role was limited. See Ashley Squires, "The Standard Oil Treatment: Willa Cather, *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy*, and Early Twentieth Century Collaborative Authorship," *Studies in the Novel*, 45 (2013), 328–48.

²⁹ See Gillian Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1998), p. 111.

³⁰ Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, 89th ed. (1936); quoted in Stokes, *The Altar at Home*, p. 215.

careers, higher education, and nontraditional family structures (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 134). Many female New Thought writers fell into this category, and followed Eddy's example with their unconventional approaches to parenting. Eddy's onetime student Hopkins, for instance, who left Boston to found her own Chicago-based New Thought sect in 1885, left her husband and son behind in this move and never saw either of them again (Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 82). Like Eddy, Hopkins wrote more about children's symbolic value than about their day-to-day presence in women's lives. Hopkins's disciple Helen Van-Anderson, meanwhile, advocated a hands-off parenting style in which children learned self-governance. In Van-Anderson's New Thought novel *Victoria True: or, the Journal of a Live Woman* (1895), the eponymous heroine's fractious children reform when she allows them to make their own decisions and spend extended periods unsupervised. While contemplating a long visit to a relative, Victoria reasons: "If I could never leave [the children], how could they prove so well their self-reliance, and how could I prove my trust in them? Besides, are they not ever with me in my love and loving thoughts?"³¹ This disciplinary style—in which idealized children require less care because they are assumed to be good—is the logical extension of a philosophy in which children represent innocence incarnate.

Hopkins's writing on the "Man Child" takes Eddy's idealization of children one step further. As the most popular New Thought teacher of the 1880s and 1890s, Hopkins promoted the idea of the divine Man Child within each adult, also called the God-Self, the I Am, or the inner light. She described this God-Self as a masculine, dominant entity within a passive, feminine individual (Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 87). This inner Man Child helped women claim authority in a culture that disapproved of feminine self-assertion, as Satter relates: "By imagining their 'personality' or 'mortal mind' as a clear window through which a 'Man Child' or God-Self radiated, Hopkins's students could behave in a forceful manner while

³¹ Helen Van-Anderson, *Victoria True; or, The Journal of a Live Woman* (Chicago: Stockham Publishing, 1895), p. 92.

still claiming to have stilled their unruly mortal ‘self’” (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 90).

Hopkins uses the Man Child to emphasize female authority in her undated pamphlet *The Radiant I AM*, where she urges followers to practice daily affirmations that fortify the divine within themselves.³² She refers to this divine inner presence as “the Man Child, my I AM—who shall rule all nations with a rod of iron,” paraphrasing Revelations 12:1–5, and continues:

I AM the unending, irresistible, beautiful Health of the whole universe. I, its Center, shed my Health abroad. This is my stopless ministry. I think this—I speak this—I write this—I live this. I AM the power of strength to the universe. Because I AM unalterable, I AM Omnipotence.³³

Hopkins’s affirmation is incantatory, fixating on the speaker’s near-Godlike powers. In affirmations such as this, the “Man Child” or “I AM” enables women to claim authority for themselves without disrupting the patriarchal status quo. A woman might attribute her desires to her inner Man Child or God Self rather than her finite mortal self, thereby legitimizing her needs and justifying her decision to live as she saw fit.

Hopkins’s influence lives on in the writing of her many disciples. These include Depression-era New Thought leader Dr. Emmet Fox (1886–1951), who was ordained by Hopkins’s student Nona Brooks (Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 102). Fox, who immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1931, preached to one of the world’s largest congregations at the Church of the Healing Christ in New York City.³⁴ He became one of the most popular New Thought writers of all time by developing Hopkins’s teachings in works such as *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (1932) and *The Sermon on the Mount* (1934), which was distributed in early meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous.

³² This pamphlet was likely written sometime between 1885 and 1895.

³³ Emma Curtis Hopkins, *The Radiant I AM* (Cornwall Bridge, Conn.: High Watch Fellowship, n.d.), pp. 4, 7; see Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, pp. 87–88.

³⁴ See Harry Gaze, *Emmet Fox: The Man and His Work* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 8.

Fox's widely circulated writings helped popularize the inner child (or the "Wonder Child," as he called it) as an "infallible counsellor" for troubled adults.³⁵ In chapter 1 of *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, Fox describes this "Wonder Child" as an "Indwelling Power, the Inner Light, or Spiritual Idea, [that] is spoken of in the Bible as a child" (*Power Through Constructive Thinking*, p. 3). Like Hopkins, Fox described the Wonder Child as male: "the child, now arrived at man's estate, turns the tables, and repays its debt by taking over the care of its mother" (*Power Through Constructive Thinking*, p. 4). In envisioning the Wonder Child and adult as mother and son, Fox emphasized the nurturing and inspirational qualities of the child, as opposed to its authoritarian power. By harnessing the wisdom of the inner Wonder Child, Fox explained, people can improve their health, make money, and become more creative.

If these statements sound familiar, it is probably because they so strikingly prefigure the works by Bradshaw and Whitfield mentioned earlier. These more recent authors likely encountered Fox through twelve-step groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, which Bradshaw attended daily for three years (Grimes, "John Bradshaw," n.p.). While Bradshaw and Whitfield borrow liberally from Fox's ideas (themselves an outgrowth of Hopkins's New Thought philosophy), they predictably foreground more respectable antecedents such as Jung and mid-twentieth-century psychologists like Donald Winnicott, Alice Miller, and transactional analyst Eric Berne. In Whitfield's brief chapter on the history of the inner child, for instance, New Thought is not once mentioned, even in the short paragraph on "spirituality."³⁶

Are these authors intellectually dishonest, or are they ignorant of the nineteenth-century religious origins of their ideas? Either way, their failure adequately to historicize the inner child is symptomatic of the recovery movement at large, whose practical emphasis leaves little room for precise intellectual genealogies. In the context of recovery, what was originally

³⁵ Emmet Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932, 1940), p. 8.

³⁶ See Whitfield, *Healing the Child Within*, pp. 5–8.

a religious idea has become a quasi-medical one, as psychotherapists and self-help gurus blended Hopkins's Man Child with Freudian and Jungian ideas to produce the wounded inner child. Despite these changes, I would argue that the inner child serves much the same function now as it did in the nineteenth century, and for a similar demographic (overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and female). The child within helps women justify self-care and self-indulgence in a culture that might otherwise frown upon these pursuits.

In the next section I show how Burnett helped pave the way for present-day inner child theory in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. This novel externalizes the Man Child of New Thought in the form of an idealized male child character who maintains a close, intersubjective bond with an adult woman, and serves as her representative outside of the domestic sphere. Their bond brings the adult closer to the divine and helps her negotiate a patriarchal social environment. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* thus models a dynamic still apparent in more recent writing about the inner child.



Frances Hodgson Burnett was ideally situated to popularize New Thought to vast audiences. She became “the wealthiest woman writer of her time on either side of the Atlantic” due to her bestselling romances for women and children and her dramatic adaptations thereof.³⁷ Though she is now best remembered for *The Secret Garden* (1911), Burnett's breakthrough success was *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, which was serialized in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1885–1886 and republished in book form by Scribner's, becoming one of the top three best-sellers in the United States in 1886.³⁸ Starting in 1888, wildly successful stage versions of the novel ran in both England and America, spawning a vogue for Fauntleroy-related merchandise such as playing cards, chocolates, perfumes, and the infamous

³⁷ Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of “The Secret Garden”* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), p. xvii.

³⁸ See Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), p. 18.

Fauntleroy suit, a velvet costume with a lace collar hated by young boys everywhere. As biographer Gretchen Gerzina explains, “after the book hit the stage, there would be no one from the smallest midwestern American town to the streets of Paris who had not heard of [Fauntleroy], and who did not know what he looked like” (*Frances Hodgson Burnett*, p. 110).

Burnett was also an enthusiastic student of Christian Science. Her first encounter with this faith occurred in the years leading up to the publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, when she experienced a prolonged bout of depression and insomnia. From 1882 to 1884, Burnett “lived in Boston and summered in Lynn, Massachusetts”—both centers of Christian Science in the religion’s early days.³⁹ While there, Burnett undertook a course of study with Eddy’s student, Anna B. Newman, and bought and read *Science and Health*.⁴⁰ The treatment helped Burnett cope with her symptoms and, later, assuaged her grief upon the untimely death of her eldest son, Lionel. Christian Science and New Thought would eventually influence Burnett’s novels, including not just *Little Lord Fauntleroy* but also *A Little Princess* (1905), *The Dawn of a To-morrow* (1906), and *The Secret Garden*.⁴¹

Despite her admiration of Eddy, Burnett never formally converted to Christian Science, citing her inability to “demonstrate” the faith through spontaneous healing.⁴² But her son Vivian—who served as the model for protagonist Cedric Errol in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*—would later join the religion and serve as an administrator in a Long Island branch of Eddy’s church (Griswold, *Audacious Kids*, p. 238). Gerzina suggests that Burnett herself might be more accurately described as

³⁹ Jerry Griswold, *Audacious Kids: The Classic American Children’s Story*, revised edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), p. 237.

⁴⁰ See Vivian Burnett, *The Romantic Lady (Frances Hodgson Burnett): The Life Story of an Imagination* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), p. 146.

⁴¹ On Christian Science and New Thought in these works, see Griswold, *Audacious Kids*, pp. 233–49; L. Ashley Squires, *Healing the Nation: Literature, Progress, and Christian Science* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2017), pp. 57–88; and Anne Stiles, “Christian Science versus the Rest Cure in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 61 (2015), 295–319.

⁴² Frances Hodgson Burnett, undated letter to Vivian Burnett, quoted in Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, p. 241.

an advocate of New Thought than a Christian Scientist, due to her loose interpretation of Eddy's works and her wide reading of religious materials beyond the Bible and *Science and Health* (Frances Hodgson Burnett, pp. 259–260). In 1913, for example, Burnett explained to a reporter: "I am not a Christian Scientist, I am not an advocate of New Thought, I am not a disciple of the Yogi teaching, I am not a Buddhist, I am not a Mohammedan, I am not a follower of Confucius. Yet I am all of these things."⁴³ Burnett's response displays an eclecticism typical of New Thought, whose leaders read widely on Eastern religions and wisdom traditions.

While Eddy was a decided influence on *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, it is unclear whether Hopkins inspired Burnett or the other way around. In chapter 7 of *Scientific Christian Mental Practice* (1888)—published the same year as the first dramatic adaptations of *Fauntleroy*—Hopkins mentions Fauntleroy and his grandfather when discussing the power of positive thinking:

Take the old Lord Fauntleroy as an example. Little Lord Fauntleroy thought he was generous and good. He really believed it. He praised his old grandfather. Everybody else condemned him. Consequently the grandfather would say, "Ask little Lord Fauntleroy. He knows me. He will tell you what I will do." Now, even if the old Lord Fauntleroy had appeared to all other people to be savage and ugly, his soul was generous and good. The little child saw the soul.⁴⁴

This detailed example raises the possibility that Hopkins adapted elements of Burnett's hero in creating her Man Child—or even that Burnett should be considered a co-creator of this figure.

In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, protagonist Cedric Errol takes on the Man Child role for his grieving mother by exerting a healing spiritual influence and providing her with an alibi for

⁴³ [Anon.], "Mrs. Burnett and the Occult," *New York Times*, 12 October 1913; rpt. in Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, ed. Gretchen Gerzina (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2006), p. 259.

⁴⁴ Emma Curtis Hopkins, *Scientific Christian Mental Practice* (1888), p. 135; available online at <newthoughtlibrary.com/hopkinsEmmaCurtis/scmp>.

socially unacceptable desires. Burnett's novel relates the story of seven-year-old Cedric, a middle-class American boy who learns that, through the death of relatives, he stands to inherit a British title. He and his mother, whom he calls "Dearest," leave New York to live with the boy's grandfather, "the wicked Earl of Dorincourt," on the family's English estate.⁴⁵ There, Cedric charms his relatives and the local peasantry with his beauty, kindness, and indifference to caste distinctions. He also reforms his irascible grandfather by giving him "something to live for" (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 185). Just as important, Cedric facilitates a symbolic reconciliation between England and America by healing the rift between his mother and grandfather, who had disinherited Cedric's father after his marriage to an American (Griswold, *Audacious Kids*, p. 123).

Literary scholars have offered various explanations for *Little Lord Fauntleroy's* initial popularity and for the novel's rapidly declining fortunes after 1900. Beverly Lyon Clark contends that Fauntleroy successfully fused together competing modes of masculinity circulating in the 1880s, including the "Christian gentleman, the self-made man, [and] the masculine primitive" (*Kiddie Lit*, p. 22). Gubar suggests that Cedric's liminal traits, including his "ability to oscillate back and forth between categories such as child and adult, male and female, rich and poor," enable him to unify radically different social worlds ("The Cult of the Child," p. 400). Anna Wilson concludes that Dearest is the novel's sentimental heroine, rather than Fauntleroy its hero, and that Fauntleroy himself is "a stalking horse, an attempt to take the domestic out into the world."⁴⁶ Each of these arguments helps explain Fauntleroy's androgyny and his appeal for women—as well as the changing gender norms that rendered his style of masculinity obsolete. By the early twentieth century, Katherine Carlson explains, Fauntleroy and his notorious velvet suit "came to represent effeminate passivity

⁴⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), p. 134. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

⁴⁶ Anna Wilson, "Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation," *American Literary History*, 8 (1996), 236.

and a threat to the male order” in contrast to the more rugged, mischievous style of boyhood then favored.⁴⁷

My own reading of the novel is potentially compatible with these interpretations, though I place greater emphasis on faith-based elements of Burnett’s work. I argue that Fauntleroy represents the inner child of New Thought at the very moment when this figure emerged into popular consciousness, thus helping to secure its continued popularity. While the novel’s religious message is not overt, Cedric’s role as New Thought exemplar would have been apparent to someone familiar with the movement. Cedric displays the personal qualities most admired by New Thought followers, including a cheerful, loving affect; abundant health; fearlessness; affiliation with royalty (literal or figurative); and androgyny. While some of these traits are associated with the nineteenth-century cult of the child more generally (and thus with protagonists as diverse as Carroll’s Alice, Dickens’s Oliver Twist, or Barrie’s Peter Pan), Burnett’s deployment of these qualities suggests her familiarity with *Science and Health* and other New Thought writings.

Cedric’s loving affect and trusting nature, for instance, reflects Eddy’s view of children as representatives of “Life, Truth, and Love.” Burnett’s emphasis on Fauntleroy’s robust health, meanwhile, represents a marked departure from the many frail and dying child protagonists earlier in the century, like Stowe’s Little Eva, Dickens’s Tiny Tim, or Alcott’s Beth March.⁴⁸ In contrast to such characters, Cedric is “always well” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 5). His rosy good looks are not the harbinger of a delicate constitution or consumptive decline, as they might be in other child-centered narratives of the period, but instead signify radiant health.

In Christian Science and other branches of the New Thought movement, good health aligns with fearlessness, a quality Cedric also possesses in abundance. Burnett’s narrator

⁴⁷ Katherine L. Carlson, “*Little Lord Fauntleroy* and the Evolution of American Boyhood,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 3 (2010), 51.

⁴⁸ On child death in nineteenth-century literature, see, for instance, Laurence Lerner, *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1997).

suggests that Cedric has never experienced negative emotions like fear or resentment. True to this characterization, Cedric immediately embraces his grandfather's "huge, lion-like" mastiff and warms to the intimidating old man himself (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 74). He likewise displays no alarm when learning to ride horseback, causing the Earl to remark: "Not much afraid, is he?" The riding master replies, "I should n't say as he knowed what it meant. I've taught young gen'lemen to ride afore, an' I never see one stick on more determinder" (p. 124). Such incidents serve not merely to prove Cedric's manliness and physical prowess, as Clark suggests, but also to evoke a now forgotten New Thought context (*Kiddie Lit.*, p. 24).

It is worth noting that Cedric does not exhibit courage—that is, the overcoming of fear through willpower—but is simply never afraid to begin with. This is an important distinction, since New Thought writers emphasized the absence of fear as a key to health and fear itself as a contagion. Eddy wrote, for instance, that "the cause of all so-called disease is mental, a mortal fear" (*Science and Health*, p. 377). She encouraged Christian Science practitioners to "begin your treatment by allaying the fear of patients. . . . if you succeed in wholly removing the fear, your patient is healed" (*Science and Health*, pp. 411–12). Influential New Thought writer Warren Felt Evans likewise emphasized that "fear . . . is the spiritual essence of disease."⁴⁹

Though he is "always well," Cedric is ever alert to signs of sickness and grief in his mother, demonstrating the unusual closeness and reciprocity of their bond. His vigilance signals a parent-child role reversal that begins with his father's death in chapter 1:

[Cedric] had always seen that his papa watched over and took great care of [his mother], and so he learned, too, to be careful of her.

So when he knew his papa would come back no more, and saw how very sad his mamma was, there gradually came into his kind little heart the thought that he must do what he could to make her happy. He was not much more than a baby, but that

⁴⁹ W. F. Evans, *Soul and Body; or, the Spiritual Science of Health and Disease* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1876), pp. 57–58.

thought was in his mind whenever he climbed upon her knee and kissed her and put his curly head on her neck. . . . he did what he could, and was more of a comfort to her than he could have understood (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 6).

A few years later, Cedric looks forward to the day when he can support his mother financially, as he explains to his grandfather: "My father left her to me to take care of, and when I am a man I am going to work and earn money for her" (p. 85). Cedric's unusual closeness to his mother, and his readiness to assume his father's role, lead Gubar to suggest that their bond resembles that of "a romantic couple" rather than "a parent/child dyad."⁵⁰ But one can also read the bond between Dearest and Cedric as the spiritual union of adult woman and Man Child. Cedric's protectiveness, and his promise to support his mother financially one day, prefigure Fox's statement about the Wonder Child who "repays its debt by taking over the care of its mother." Like the Wonder Child, Fauntleroy secures his mother's health, wealth, and happiness, well before he "arrive[s] at man's estate" (*Power Through Constructive Thinking*, p. 4).

Cedric's generosity toward his mother also points to his innate nobility of character, which becomes literalized in his unexpected inheritance of an Earldom. His title, Lord Fauntleroy, underscores this point: in Old French, *Fauntleroy* means child (*enfant*) of the king (*le roi*).⁵¹ Fauntleroy's nobility signals a key preoccupation of early New Thought writers, who stressed a "royal birthright" or "divine inheritance" to console believers beset by downward economic mobility, marital problems, or unruly children (Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, pp. 119, 134). In Van-Anderson's New Thought novel *The Right Knock* (1889), for instance, believers are told that they will be reborn in Christian Science and "find . . . the palace doors open to receive us, and the insignia of royalty written upon our faces."⁵²

⁵⁰ Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), p. 177.

⁵¹ Many thanks to Ruth Evans for this etymology.

⁵² Helen Van-Anderson, *The Right Knock: A Story* (1889); quoted in Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 119.

In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric is described as a “fairy prince,” suggesting the masculine questing hero of romance (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 71). But his passivity and objectification render him more Cinderella than Prince Charming, as Wilson observes.⁵³ However off-putting Fauntleroy’s androgyny was to some critics, it undoubtedly contributed to his appeal. Claudia Nelson argues, for instance, that effeminate boy characters appealed to nineteenth-century women who wished to reform society by inculcating stereotypically feminine virtues in both sexes.⁵⁴ As if to underscore his girlish traits, Cedric was usually played by long-haired actresses (most famously by Mary Pickford) in stage and screen adaptations of the novel (Griswold, *Audacious Kids*, p. 295n). Cedric’s dandyish clothing, meanwhile, may be an homage to Oscar Wilde, whom Burnett met during his 1882 North American lecture tour, and to the aesthetic movement that Wilde embodied.⁵⁵ Like most people at the time, Burnett would not necessarily have connected Wilde’s lavish costume to his sexual preferences, which became widely known only after his 1895 conviction for gross indecency.

Fauntleroy’s androgyny would also have appealed to New Thought followers, though for somewhat different reasons. Following the model of Eddy’s “Father-Mother God,” believers were encouraged to cultivate an ideal mixture of male and female qualities. Eddy argued that

The masculine mind reaches a higher tone through certain elements of the feminine, while the feminine mind gains courage and strength through masculine qualities. These different elements conjoin naturally with each other, and their true harmony is in spiritual oneness. Both sexes should be loving, pure, tender, and strong. (*Science and Health*, p. 57)

⁵³ See Wilson, “Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation,” pp. 242, 256, n. 7.

⁵⁴ Claudia Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children’s Fiction, 1857–1917* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991), p. 4.

⁵⁵ See Ann Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1849–1924* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), p. 71; and John Seelye, “Jane Eyre”’s American Daughters: From “The Wide, Wide World” to “Anne of Green Gables”: A Study of Marginalized Maidens and What They Mean (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 207.

As an admiring reader of *Science and Health*, Burnett is careful to emphasize her hero's "manliness" and athletic prowess.⁵⁶ Yet she also lauds his more stereotypically feminine virtues such as empathy, which he demonstrates by carefully nurturing his mother.

But Fauntleroy's most important New Thought quality is his ability to act on his mother's behalf, thus fulfilling the key function of the Man Child. For instance, in Burnett's 1888 dramatic adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Dearest, when she introduces herself to the boy's grandfather, frankly acknowledges: "Cedric will speak for me."⁵⁷ The novel, meanwhile, presents multiple instances where Fauntleroy does just this. For instance, when Mrs. Errol wishes to improve the living conditions of the Earl's tenants, she decides to use her son's influence. "The Earl would give him anything," muses Mrs. Errol; "Why should not that indulgence be used for the good of others?" (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 142). Accordingly, Mrs. Errol tells Cedric about the disgraceful state of the cottages in Earl's Court, trusting him to report it to his grandfather. Predictably, the Earl soon employs "a small army of workmen" to demolish the rickety dwellings (p. 143). Though Mrs. Errol's intentions here are unselfish, the episode suggests how she might exploit her son in other scenarios. For instance, her son's intervention eventually enables her to live at Dorincourt Castle, as she has long desired. Like Hopkins's Man Child, Cedric helps his mother negotiate a society that discouraged feminine self-assertion, while allowing her to appear appropriately selfless.

Intriguingly, the novel's form replicates the dynamic between adult woman and Man Child by representing Dearest's perspective in passages about Fauntleroy himself. One might even argue that Mrs. Errol is the novel's principal focalizer, especially in the opening section about Cedric's New York beginnings.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ On the significance of the word "manly" in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, see Carlson, "Little Lord Fauntleroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood," p. 42.

⁵⁷ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy: A Drama in Three Acts Founded on the Story of the Same Name* (New York: Samuel French, 1889), p. 27; Act. 2, scene 1.

⁵⁸ Burnett's novel lacks a single focalizer; the viewpoint moves between various observers of Fauntleroy, and occasionally to Fauntleroy himself. Dearest's perspective is arguably the most important and consistently rendered, however.

... it seemed as if there never had been a more fortunate baby. In the first place, he was always well, and so he never gave any one trouble; in the second place, he had so sweet a temper and ways so charming that he was a pleasure to every one; and in the third place, he was so beautiful to look at that he was quite a picture (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, p. 5)

The description underscores Cedric's effect upon his beholders—his beauty, his easygoing manner, his ability to give “pleasure”—especially to Dearest, who was undoubtedly the most frequent beholder of such early scenes. In this passage, as in Mrs. Errol's relationship with the Earl, her son's beauty and gentleness “speak for [her],” diffusing her presence throughout the narrative without explicitly foregrounding it.

While Cedric is, of course, a fictional character, he and his mother are loosely based on real people: Burnett and her younger son, Vivian, who also called his mother “dearest.” In her essay “How Fauntleroy Occurred: And a Very Real Little Boy Became an Ideal One” (1894), Burnett lovingly portrays seven-year-old Vivian as he appeared around the time she wrote *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Though she is ostensibly describing a “very real little boy,” Vivian seems nearly as idealized as his fictional counterpart, down to his curly love-locks, rosy cheeks, and his “peaceful resolve never to be in the way, and never to make any one uncomfortable.”⁵⁹

Like *Little Lord Fauntleroy* itself, Burnett's autobiographical piece evokes a New Thought parenting style reminiscent of Hopkins and Van-Anderson, whose idealized children require little oversight. For instance, Burnett rapturously describes how Vivian and his brother Lionel were well behaved enough to undertake unsupervised railway travel: “It was quite safe to send them. If they had not been able to take care of themselves, half the world would have taken care of them. Conductors conversed with them, passengers were interested in them, and they arrived at the end of their travels laden with tribute” (“How Fauntleroy Occurred,” p. 190). Conveniently, Vivian and

⁵⁹ Frances Hodgson Burnett, “How Fauntleroy Occurred: And a Very Real Little Boy Became an Ideal One,” in her *Piccolo and Other Child Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 153.

Lionel's exceptional charm frees their mother from the responsibility of finding a chaperone.

Vivian also resembles Cedric in his willingness to care for his mother. During her bouts of insomnia and depression, Vivian frequently attempted to soothe his mother to sleep. Burnett describes one of "many disturbed and weary nights, when the door of [her] room opened quietly and a little figure entered—such an adorable figure, in a white nightgown, and with bright hair, tumbled by sleep." This turns out to be Vivian, who says, "I've come to take care of you dearest," with an "indescribable protecting and comforting air" ("How Fauntleroy Occurred," p. 193). Burnett eventually comes to think of Vivian as her "protector and medical attendant," much as Mrs. Errol turns to Cedric to allay her grief ("How Fauntleroy Occurred," pp. 195–96).

In "How Fauntleroy Occurred," Burnett gives the impression that Vivian's healing qualities come to him effortlessly; his "soothing" presence "seemed to emanate from his childish softness" without apparent strain ("How Fauntleroy Occurred," p. 194). But Vivian's own perspective, related in his 1927 biography of his mother, suggests that such episodes took a psychological toll. Of their stay in Lynn, Vivian writes:

There was, however, one grief to this summer. Dearest was not well. This was plain, even to the boys, who had never known her other than a gay, laughing companion. She spent much time in the hammock and she did not seem to be able to take part in their plays, or to care very much about them. (*The Romantick Lady*, p. 127)

Burnett's account of Vivian's boyhood glosses over this challenging period and minimizes the difficulties of a child prematurely placed in a caretaking role.

Indeed, Vivian's biography of his mother suggests that her idealization of children served, in part, to compensate for perceived maternal failings. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, for instance, was allegedly written to "make things even" with the boys, who were upset that their mother spent so much time writing (Vivian Burnett, *The Romantick Lady*, p. 142). Thus began a pattern in which Burnett composed works for or about children to atone

for neglecting her offspring. Gerzina characterizes Burnett as “an adoring but largely absent mother” who spent months, even years away from her boys as she traveled between England and America to oversee dramatic productions of her novels (*Frances Hodgson Burnett*, p. xv). The boys, who remained with their father in Washington, D.C., or were sent to boarding school, were saddened by her frequent absences and erratic correspondence. Tragically, her elder son, Lionel, fell ill with tuberculosis during one such absence and died in 1890. Overcome with guilt, Burnett wrote at least two works inspired by Lionel in the following years, including her ghost story *The White People* (1917).

I do not wish to condemn Burnett, who obviously loved her sons. Like most modern working mothers, she was stretched thin, serving as her family’s primary breadwinner while struggling with her own fragile health and strained marriage. But “How Fauntleroy Occurred” suggests that New Thought writers’ idealization of children had less to do with children themselves than with adult concerns, including parental guilt and the desire to minimize maternal responsibility. The inner child or Man Child not only helped women assert their desires in a patriarchal society, but also deflected concerns about their very real children and the care they required.

Modern self-help writers might feel uncomfortable tracing the lineage of the inner child back to an effeminate hero like Fauntleroy or to a nineteenth-century new religious movement such as New Thought. But as I have argued here, that is exactly what we must do to understand the gendered and spiritual dimensions of this cultural figure. These aspects are misrepresented in current self-help literature on the inner child, which is usually written by men and uses predominantly male examples. But as my discussion of Eddy, Hopkins, and Burnett has shown, women have used the inner child to negotiate social pressures for well over a hundred years. Moreover, it is no coincidence that the inner child experienced a resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s, when women began entering the workforce in increasing numbers. As these women juggled their new professional responsibilities with traditional household duties, the need to carve out time for relaxation and self-care became

more urgent. So did the need to justify this self-care by imagining oneself as a child. The persistence of the inner child concept thus suggests that the women's movement has important psychological work left to do. It is not enough to grant women access to careers once denied them; social attitudes must also change so that women feel free to enjoy these opportunities and take time for themselves without regret.

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ABSTRACT

Anne Stiles, "New Thought and the Inner Child in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*" (pp. 326–352)

In twenty-first-century popular psychology and self-help literature, the "inner child" refers to an original or true self that serves as a repository of wisdom and creativity for its adult counterpart. This essay traces the modern inner child back to the nineteenth-century new religious movement known as New Thought, which emphasized positive thinking as a means to health and prosperity. Emma Curtis Hopkins, the leading New Thought teacher of the 1880s and 1890s, described an idealized "Man Child" within each adult woman who could lead her to spiritual serenity and worldly success. Frances Hodgson Burnett fictionalized this figure in her blockbuster novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), whose eponymous child hero helps his mother achieve undreamed-of wealth and status. He also serves as her proxy outside of the domestic sphere, allowing her to reach personal goals without appearing selfish or inappropriately ambitious. The novel's enormous popularity may have had something to do with this symbiotic relationship between mother and son. Then as now, the inner child helped women reconcile social pressures to be selfless and giving with career pursuits and self-indulgent behavior. The persistence of the inner child suggests that contemporary feminism still has work to do in enabling women to embrace opportunities without guilt.

Keywords: Frances Hodgson Burnett; *Little Lord Fauntleroy*; New Thought; inner child; popular psychology