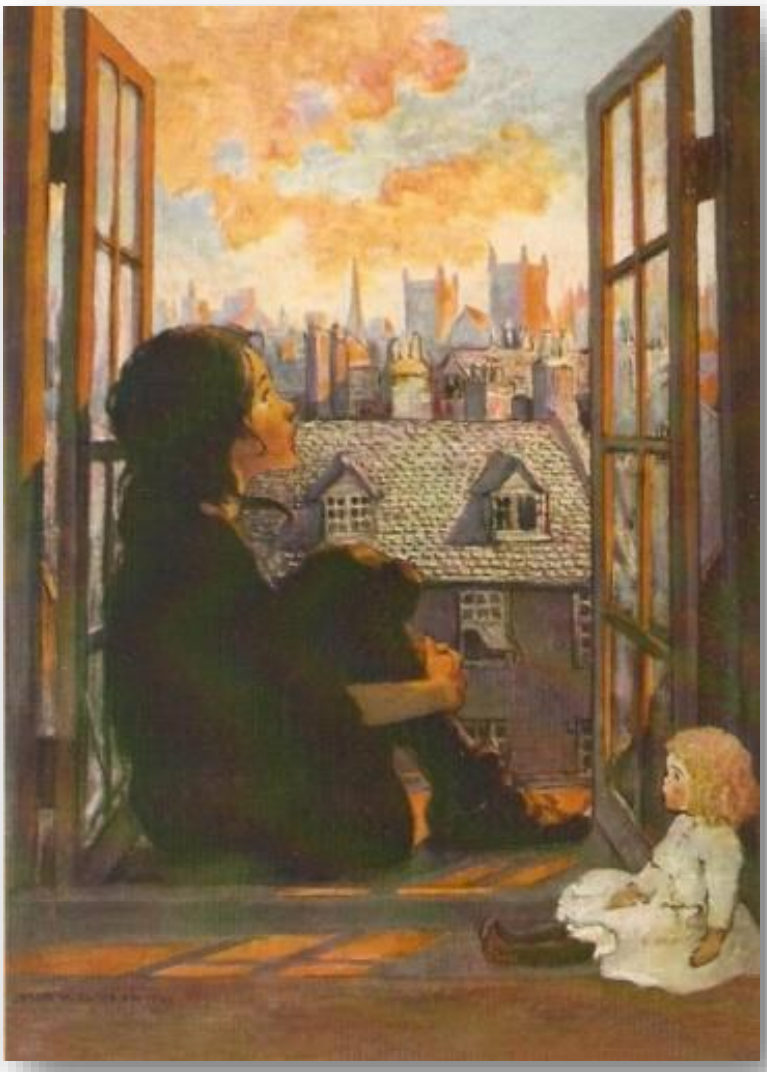
Shaping Girl Generations Throughout the Twentieth Century:

Time's Effect on the Filmic Representations of the

A Little Princess novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett.



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Introduction

The *A Little Princess* novel has been translated from book to film several times throughout the twentieth century and each time this has produced a similar story, though one with significant additions and changes. This thesis will argue that these transformations in the original tale reveal the cultural changes that have occurred since each previous adaptation.

The *A Little Princess* tale was rewritten two times after it was first published. The first edition of this story was called *Sara Crewe, or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's.* After the story was rewritten as a serial and then reworked as a children's play, Burnett rewrote the entire story, adding new passages and sections to it until it appeared as *A Little Princess, Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe Now Told For the First time* (Marian E. Brown 199). This version was published in 1904 and it is the final version on which the four film adaptations discussed in this thesis were based. Brown explains that "[t]he author gained two important insights from the reworking as a play: the importance of combining incident in the most telling manner, and the value of dialogue" (201). The *A Little Princess* play inspired Burnett to makes changes to her original story because she saw how these alterations could provide additional humour, suspense and general atmosphere to her story. That is how the story that inspired several filmic adaptations was created. Overall, *A Little Princess* has survived more than 100 years and has been recreated several times over that time.

Bringing a story from paper to film seems a dangerous aspect of the film industry, as Mary Hall explains: "such 'translation' approaches [the ideology that some aspects of novels can and some aspects cannot be copied by films] end up leading to 'fidelity criticism' that privileges the original text" (9). She continues to say that "if it stays too close to the novel, it [the film] can be criticized for 'trying to be the book', with the implication either that it is incapable of doing such a thing and so shouldn't even try, or that is simply is not offering enough that is new to justify its own existence" (10). The films must satisfy the high standards

of the audience and they must also fit in the particular time-period in which they appear. This automatically causes changes to the details of the story because the social and cultural conventions change over time. In order to represent these changes, specific details concerning the life of particular characters can be different depending on the time-period in which a film is produced.

Films can be criticized for trying to be the book. Differences will occur when a book is translated to the screen. Aside from representing a different artistic way to tell the story, these differences say something about the social standards of the particular time in which the film was created. The films show, in their own way, what it was like be a child in these particular periods and how children were expected to behave. There are four aspects of childhood on which the *A Little Princess* adaptations offer differing interpretations. One is the imagination that Sara uses throughout the story. Secondly, there is the intellect Sara shows and how this is either encouraged or discouraged by her environment in the films. Thirdly, we see the attention her contemporary society pays to the significance of social contacts and a close community. Lastly, the opinion of society concerning gender stereotypes can be seen by the manner in which male and female characters are treated in the films, which will therefore be studied in the fourth chapter. The goal of this thesis is to find out what time has done to the representation of the main character Sara. In each twentieth-century film adaptation of *A Little Princess*, the changes to the story-line and the characters influence the social and cultural status of the main character Sara Crewe in order to create the perfect female hero for each contemporary society.

The *A Little Princess* novel has been transferred to the screen several times. The first filmic adaptation was produced in 1917. In this silent film, Mary Pickford plays a cheerful, creative and childish Sara with long brown curls. The film is an hour long and contains the basic storyline that occurs in the original novel with a few additions such as a dream scene

that was heavily influenced by the *1001 Nights*. The 1939 technicolour adaptation continued this tendency of showing a child-like Sara that would be loved by the audience. However, Shirley Temple was actually a child and not an adult. This film not only portrayed a story that closely followed the novel but also added a secret affair between two adult characters, several dance scenes for entertainment purposes and a few dramatic scenes in which Sara searches for her father. The eighties adaptation was a television-series with a total of 6 episodes that aired on the BBC channel in the first two months of 1987. This series is known for being the most loyal to the original book compared to the earlier mentioned adaptations. The 1995 film represents a story that appears to be influenced by both the 1939 and the 1986 adaptations as it incorporated elements from both adaptations. Aside from that, this film brings a perspective from Sara's father and several exciting scenes that did not appear in the earlier adaptations.

These English film adaptations are not the only films inspired by the *A Little Princess* novel. Japanese companies created two television series about the novel. The first one is an anime series published in 1985. This series *Princess Sarah* is already considered a classic and has been dubbed into several languages and aired in several countries. The second Japanese adaptation is a drama *Shokojo Seira* that aired in 2009. A major change in this series is that Sara's servant friend is not a young girl Becky but a young boy Kaito Miura. Kaito is not an unpaid servant but an employee who works for the seminary to earn money for college. This allows the drama to introduce a romantic relationship between the two main characters. The anime adaptation dating from 1985 inspired the Filipino remake *Sara… Ang Munting Prinsesa* (1995) starring Camille Prats and Mat Ranillo III. The Philippines also made a series called *Princess Sarah.* This series that stars Sharlene San Pedro, Albert Martinez and Sheryl Cruz is also based on the Japanese anime series. One drastic cast difference is that Ram Dass is not a male but a female character called Rama Dass. Lavinia is Miss Minchin's daughter. Also, Captain Crewe does not die but is held hostage by Mr. Burrose because the latter wants

Crewe to surrender a map. As can be seen, there are many film adaptations but in this essay the focus will be on the English adaptations.

Seeing as there are many adaptations of the novel, there have been a lot of statements made about the novel and the adaptations as well. Sara Rothschild mentions that "each of these adaptations reflect the changes in society at the time they were produced, and what each one does with Sara's character illuminates the ways this princess story was modified to make it more palatable to its period" (10). She goes on to state that "interestingly, the most recent filmic adaptation most undermines Sara's story, rendering her least powerful of the three" (10). In a way, this can be seen as out of step with the political and gender-related changes society has gone through during the decades between the films. What was considered powerful in the first half of the twentieth century does not necessarily have to be considered as equally powerful near the end of the twentieth century. Susan Applebaum comments that "[h]e [Cuarón] foregrounded the progressive aspects of Sara's character and focused on themes relevant to late twentieth-century America e.g. Sara's strengths as a female heroine, the power of community […], the representation of non-western culture" (83). In a way, this could be said about every adaptation discussed in this essay. In each twentieth-century film adaptation of *A Little Princess*, the changes to the story-line and the characters influence the social and cultural status of the main character Sara Crewe in order to create the perfect female hero for each contemporary society.

Phyliss Koppes compares the *A Little Princess* story to a *Cinderella* story, "Like the Cinderella tale, Burnett's stories do not emphasize a change within the main character but rather in the recognition of that character's true nature. The change comes within others, those who are influenced by the child's true nature" (193). In every adaptation, the characters change after Sara appears in their lives. However, this change is most apparent in the nineties film. The film shows how Ermengarde gets smarter, Lottie appears to be braver and even

Sara's nemesis Lavinia becomes Sara's friend. All these changes are directly inspired by Sara. Rosemary George mentions that "the novel makes much of her stoic and soldierly determination to put up with adversity, which is carried over into Cuarón's film" (141). Rothschild mentioned that nineties Sara is the least powerful. However, according to George, nineties Sara does show some of the traits that are considered an important aspect of her character in the novel. Elisabeth Gruner states that "Sara accomplishes much, if not all, of her redemption on her own; she is not 'rescued from cinders into marriage'" (178), which again represents an aspect of Sara's story that is carried into every film adaptation. In a way, the nineties and thirties films are more progressive as these two films incorporate the idea that Sara saves her father and thus recovers her fortune all on her own. Thus, all these different opinions suggest that nineties Sara may not be the least powerful version created in the twentieth century.

Throughout the twentieth century, filmmakers turned to novels as inspiration for their films. Brian McFarlane mentions that: "[a]s soon as the cinema began to see itself as a narrative entertainment, the idea of ransacking the novel - that already established repository of narrative fiction - for source material got underway" (7). He also suggests that the cultural context in which a film is made can change the eventual product (viii). Linda Hutcheon seems to agree, as she mentions that "adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable, even without any conscious updating or alteration of setting […] the meaning and impact of stories can change radically" (xviii). Fiona Collins and Jeremy Ridgman say that a function of "adaptation and transposition has been to bring classic texts to life for a new audience within a particular historical context" (11). Thus, adaptation becomes a manner of rehashing classic stories and reproducing them as a product of the time in which it is created.

The novel *A Little Princess* is a children's book, and must therefore be understood in relation to critical discussions of fiction for children. Karen Lury mentions that, as with the *A*

Little Princess films, when children are the main characters the films tend to involve an active imagination: “real events are important but they exist in constant tension with what is being imagined” (6). Lury goes on to assert that “[children] can reveal the strangeness of the world in which they live” (6). This occurs in the *A Little Princess* films as well. Each film shows how Sara is thrust into a strict Western society and she has to conform to rules that are unfamiliar to her. In her biography of Burnett, Ann Thwaite mentions that “Looking back on it many years later, Frances said she could still feel this first realization that people who were grown-up could do what they chose – hold babies, come and go as they pleased. Moreover, that they could always stop children doing what they wanted” (5). So, she created a world in which children are still confronted by this total authority of adults, while these same children can also create their own world in which they are in control. Ruth Jenkins adds that “these fictional children and creatures enable their readers the imaginative opportunity to experience a variety of potential scripts, free from prohibition even when challenging those constructs endorsed by culture” (2). Children’s literature tends to include imagination as a means to alter the severity of the reality the children encounter with the world.

The main issue under consideration in this essay is Sara’s position as a female hero in the filmic adaptations and the cultural and social changes that occurred throughout the century affected her representation. Tina Chanter declares that “as soon as we are born, we are colour-coded as boy or girl, and systematically trained according to our genders” (3). Gender is here understood as the way in which ‘sex’ becomes understood and controlled within a culture, framed by social rules and expectations. Maya Götz says that “Children’s grow up in a society that from the very beginning subjects them to a binary division into girls or boys. They accept this division very early on and construct their self-image and identity accordingly” (3). As Götz explains, when a person is born as a boy or a girl, he or she will be treated in a certain manner by society and in return society will expect that person to behave in a certain way.

Rebbeca C. Hains argues that "television's girls are symbolic models through which viewers […] learn about girls' status in society, their relationship to others in our social structure, and the possibilities and limitations culturally proscribed of girlhood" (xii). This occurs in the *A Little Princess* adaptations as well. Sara is required to behave in a certain manner because she is a young lady. This is expected of her in every filmic adaptation but each film shows this in a different manner which respectively says something about the specific time period in which the films were published.

The topic of colonialism naturally forms part of any understanding of the *A Little Princess* adaptations. The references to the United Kingdom's control over India are present in each film. Rosemary George mentions that the nineties film "has a calculated sense of 'historical innocence', matched by a corresponding 'racial innocence'" (144). The colonial history is both present and not present in the nineties film. Susan Applebaum states that "the subservience of the servant Ram Dass in the original, which in 1903 reinforced colonial attitudes, the 1995 Ram Dass became a powerful presence throughout the film —a truly symbolic figure of the mysterious 'other'" (83). Colonialism is present in the films —visible through tiny details but still invisible to the untrained eye. Colonialism is an important aspect of the *A Little Princess* story. However, important as it would be in other contexts, this essay will not touch upon this topic in depth, as this essay focuses mainly about the representation of Sara's character concerning historical gender-stereotypes, leaving aside how questions of race and the post-colonial might feed into those stereotypes.

Depending on the films, the reasoning for Sara's representation can also stem from the actress playing the part of Sara. In the 1917 silent film, Sara is played by Mary Pickford. According to Vibiana Cvetkovic, Pickford "has established a successful formula for images of childhood in films. She created an archetype of American girlhood that audiences clamoured to see" (21), and in order to cater to these expectations "Pickford plays Sara as the ultimate

Romantic child […] Sara behaves in ways totally at odds with Burnett's grave, old-fashioned, and queer little girl" (18). Pickford was known for her sweet-little-girl-roles and so she had to show a new version of Sara to her audience. Similarly, in the 1939 version, Shirley Temple was cast for the part of Sara. Shirley Temple was a child star and she was known for her sweet smile and the audience loved her for her entertaining roles. Therefore, Temple also showed a Sara quite different from the original novel. Janice Kirkland states: "Gone is the Sara Crewe who has the strength to repress her anger […] Shirley pouts and stamps her feet and later does a tap dance at the hospital while looking for her father" (197). Again, Shirley Temple was expected to perform a child-like role in which she showed her smiles and exaggerated emotions, which caused her to have to show yet another new version of Sara. In the 1986 adaptation, Amelia Shankley was casted to play Sara. As Shankley was an unknown actress at the time, there was not necessarily a reason to change Sara's character as there was for Pickford and Temple. This explains why the 1986 Sara stays closer to the representation of Sara in the novel. In the nineties film, Sara was played by Liesel Matthews. Again, the nineties film was Matthew's first real film and therefore there was no reason for her to adjust the representation of Sara to her audience's needs. Therefore, the nineties Sara does not show the same childish behaviour as her American predecessors. Thus, the reputation of the actress playing Sara influences the representation of Sara in the film. Though the films all represent and show a similar story, they are all very different because they were created in various historical time periods. This essay will provide an overview of the effect history can have on a timeless story.

Childish Dreams or Make-shift Reality:

The Utilization of Imagination in the Western Adaptations of *A Little Princess*.

Imagination is one aspect of the *A Little Princess* stories that entwines in the story and influences what happens to the characters. The main character Sara actively draws strength from her imagination because it allows her to interpret the events that happen to her in a more positive manner. Susan Applebaum mentions that "Sara copes by drawing on her vivid imagination and 'princess-like' self-discipline, on her belief in the transformational magic of storytelling" (73). Sara's imagination is incorporated in each film adaptation. Though similar scenes are used, the different adaptations show conflicting interpretations of these scenes. However, these interpretations do portray similar ideals. Sara pretends to be a princess so that she can endure difficult situations gracefully and she pretends to be a soldier when she has to say goodbye to her father – comparing her stay at the seminary with a soldier going to battle. Sara's imagination appears to be a coping mechanism - as long as it is pretence she can believe that her difficult circumstances are not real and this empowers her. She is not a poor orphan but she is a prisoner or soldier on a mission. As mentioned in the introduction, according to adaptation theory the representation of Sara's imagination should be different in each film as the concept is influenced by the contemporary norms of each time. Keeping this in consideration, it can be said that imagination as a psychological asset for Sara is interpreted in a different manner in each filmic adaptation and these different interpretations add their own strengths and weaknesses to the main character.

The nineties Sara shows a firm belief in her own imagination as she utilizes her own story to console herself when she hears that her father has died. In the beginning of the film, Sara's voice narrates a story about Rama and Sita. In the story, Rama draws a circle in the sand and tells Sita to stay in the circle because she will be safe there. After Sara hears that her father has died and that she has to start working as a servant, she is left alone in the attic.

There she draws a circle around herself on the ground, lies down inside it and she starts to cry. Rosemary George mentions that "[t]his is a powerful symbolic depiction of how Sara draws strength and courage from her Indian experience" (149). Though there is no doubt that her stories are based on her time in India, stating that she only draws strength and courage from her Indian experience is not enough in this situation. Sara clearly draws strength from her own imagination. She does not believe in the magic circle because that is a habit in India but she believes in it because the characters in her story do. Granted, the *Ramayana* is an existing Indian tale which means that Sara did not create the story herself, but the gravity she allows the tale to have on her life and the manner in which she allows it to correspond to her life in general empowers her because she utilizes the story to make her life on the seminary more exciting and more bearable at the same time. For Sara, the circle represents her own little space which is free from danger and where she can cry and show insecurity – which is not allowed outside this little space. The circle Sara draws on the ground when she feels sad is a symbolic representation of interpretation of the way in which she draws strength from her imagination.

In the 1917 *A Little Princess,* Sara reverses the stereotypical gender roles as she assigns herself in the position of the hero, using her own imagination to empower herself. The man finds a cave with gold in it and he brings it back to the palace to buy the slave girl Morgiana [Sara]. At first, the film hints that Morgiana is going to be saved by the prince, until the actual plot becomes clear when Morgiana is the one who saves her prince. Morgiana realizes the forty thieves are planning on killing her lover, whom they think is the sultan, and she creates a plan. She takes on a leading role as she tells another servant to throw boiling oil in the vases in which the thieves are hiding. After this she goes into the room, distracts the two men by dancing for them until she decides to attack and she kills the imposter. Pickford plays both Sara and Morgiana, which suggests that Sara is imagining herself as Morgiana and

thus imagining herself in a powerful position. She is the one saving her prince rather than the other way around. This reverses the typical gender roles and since Sara is telling the story and she appears as the main character, this implies that Sara is giving herself the role of a hero. Gaylyn Studlar mentions that "the girl protagonist's difficult circumstances also allowed her to have adventures that emphasized the enjoyable and humorous dimensions of her independence" (37). This independence is emphasized by the heroic role Pickford plays in the imagination sequence. If Pickford's films were known for showing an independent female character to a female audience that was longing for similar freedom, this sequence in which the little girl saves her lover and becomes a hero would cater to these longings.

In the 1939 version of *A Little Princess* Sara imagines herself in a powerful position so that she can influence the happenings around her. Though the rhyming and dancing makes it clear that Sara's dream is there for entertainment purposes only, the fact that all the characters in the dream are played by characters that appear in Sara's life tells more about the film itself. In general, Sara is quite powerless in the film. She is a servant and she cannot help her friends. But in her imagination, Sara is a queen. Miss Minchin is a woman dressed in all black who wants to have Miss Rose and Geoffrey Hamilton tried for a stolen kiss. In the seminary, Miss Rose and Geoffrey love each other but Miss Minchin will not allow them to be in a relationship. In Sara's dream, Sara can stop Miss Minchin and allow Miss Rose and Geoffrey to be in a relationship. This puts Sara in an empowered position as, similarly to the 1917 version; she saves her friends and puts a stop to Miss Minchin. Rothschild suggests that Sara "sees the world around her and uses her imagination to make perceptual changes in the world" (33). Sara wants to have control over the situation so much that she imagines herself in control of the situation. This empowers Sara automatically as the imagination sequence allows Sara to feel in control of her life.

Nineties Sara does not play a role in the *Ramayana* that she narrates, but in a way the

events in the *Ramayana* correspond to the happenings in Sara's life. When Sara tells her classmates that Sita is sitting in her lonely tower, missing her lover greatly, the screen shows that Sara hugs her doll Emily, which was given to her by her father. Knowing this, it can be assumed that Sita missing her lover corresponds to how much Sara is missing her father. Later in the film, a clip of the *Ramayana* is shown in which Rama dies after being surrounded by arrows that let out a poisonous gas. Right after this the shot moves to the battlefield on which Captain Crewe supposedly dies after trying to save his colleague. The *Ramayana* continues with a deer that offers up its life in order to resurrect Rama and right after that the screen shows how Captain Crewe is found in the hospital after being presumed dead. In a way, this can be seen as Captain Crewe being resurrected as well, especially since Crewe's colleague John died and the only reason that Charles Randolph takes Crewe in is because his son John Randolph died. Charles Randolph came to the hospital thinking that he would find his son John there but he finds Captain Crewe. Still, he decides to take Crewe in while considering that he would appreciate it if a stranger who found his son would take care of his son too. Therefore, John's death is indirectly the reason that Crewe can find his way back to Sara. These correspondences between the reality and Sara's imagination show that there is a direct link between Sara's life on the seminary and the adventures in the *Ramayana*.

In the nineties film, Sara is empowered by the use of her imagination when she pretends to curse Lavinia in order to teach her nemesis a lesson. There is one particular scene in which Sara finally has had enough of Lavinia. It occurs when Sara is a maid and she has to go to Lavinia's room to wake a fire in the fireplace. Lavinia proceeds to taunt Sara until Sara has had enough. The protagonist pretends to curse Lavinia by speaking in a language Lavinia does not understand and making big gestures with her arms. In the thirties version, something similar occurs. The main difference is that in the thirties version Sara throws ashes all over Lavinia. The reason for this difference could be that in the nineties film the emphasis on

Sara's upbringing in India is more often present. Rosemary George mentions that Sara is represented as "the little Indian girl [...] one for whom a faraway home serves as the locus of memory, myth-making, longing, and as a vital source for psychic strength" (155). Nineties Sara draws heavily on her memories of India as she supposedly curses Lavinia. She even tells Lavinia that she just performed a curse that she learned from a witch in India. Presuming that Lavinia has no knowledge about India, her lack of knowledge empowers Sara because Sara can make Lavinia believe that this curse is real. Sara's childhood in India serves as an inspiration that can help her fend off her enemies.

The manner in which Sara's relationship to the doll Emily is shown in the films either adds initiative to Sara's character or removes this initiative altogether. In the eighties series, Sara shows initiative concerning Emily. She already knows that Emily is waiting for her somewhere in a store in England. Sara tells her father that Emily thinks and only Sara can hear what Emily thinks. This statement makes Emily's thoughts a secret only Sara knows - adding power to Sara's character. Sara decides who gets to know what Emily thinks. In the 1917 adaptation, Sara already has the doll when she leaves for London. She makes no comment on Emily or whether Emily thinks or not. The same occurs in the 1939 version of this story. Thirties Sara already has Emily in her arms when she is on her way to the seminary. Captain Crewe and Sara discuss Emily and whether or not she will be a good friend to Sara (00:03:25-00:03:39). In the nineties version, the situation is the opposite of what happens in the eighties series. Captain Crewe is the one who introduces Emily to Sara. He also instigates the idea that dolls like Emily can move whenever the owners are not looking. Sara believes this. Later she is shown leaving her room before quickly running back to see if she can catch Emily moving while Crewe's voice states "[b]ut before we walk in and catch them they return to their place as quick as lightning" (00:12:43-00:12:46). This also happens in the eighties version but it is Sara's idea to see if they can catch Emily moving. In the

eighties adaptation, Sara takes the initiative concerning the doll Emily which automatically brings more authority to her character compared to the other filmic adaptations.

In the 1917 version of *A Little Princess,* Sara forgets all about the world around her while she tells her stories. Even as she is forced to become a maid, Sara still believes that her doll Emily can move when she is not present and this can be seen by the manner in which she and Becky try to catch Emily moving when they are both going up to their room (00:45:43-00:47:00). Though Sara continues to believe in her imagination, she has somewhat more trouble to convey this belief to her friends on the seminary. In a way, Sara's exaggerated behaviour when she is telling a story is needed because the 1917 film is a silent film and therefore the characters have to mime meaning to convey what they want to tell. Still, the manner in which the other characters such as Becky react to Sara's behaviour conveys that her tendency is meant to be considered funny. Vibiana Cvetkovic mentions that Becky "grimaces and rolls her eyes as Sara takes off on verbal flights of fancy" (19). In this way, Sara's imagination is represented as more of a comical feat. Sara loses herself in her imagination as she tells her stories and forgets all about her surroundings. When Sara is out riding with two other girls, Sara is shown as so distracted by her storytelling that she does not notice that Lottie falls out of the carriage (00:11:28-00:12:15). This represents 1917 Sara as more of a daydreamer. Cvetkovic continues to explain that Pickford's "Sara is a mischievous, sunny charmer" (18). The 1917 Sara fulfils the at the time contemporary social regulations for childlike behaviour by acting like a silly daydreamer. In this way, Sara's imagination and storytelling ability is used as a tool to present a perfect early twentieth-century child.

Becky's silent but obvious commentary on Sara's behaviour could function as a representation of the chorus found in Greek plays. Celine Delcayre explains that "the chorus functions as a storytelling device by serving as a link between the audience and the piece itself, highlighting important aspects of the scene and projecting and emphasizing the current

emotional state of the piece" (1). Becky appears to be torn between her admiration for Sara's stories and her disapproval of Sara's behaviour. Despite her adoration for Sara, Becky ridicules Sara's tendency to daydream and this attributes to the ideology that Sara is merely an adorable child. Additionally, this reinforces the idea that Sara's words and behaviour should not be taken too seriously as she is just a daydreaming child. This affects Sara's significance in the film itself as she changes from a girl whom draws strength from her imagination to a child that is led by her daydreams.

Similarly, in the thirties film Sara's imagination allows her to take control over situations that are not necessarily under her control at first. In the 1939 version of *A Little Princess* Sara has a firm faith in her own ideals. When she loses her father, this firm belief in her imagination makes it natural for her to maintain this firmness concerning her hope that her father survived the war. In the 1939 version, Sara pretends to be a soldier more often than she pretends to be a princess. When she says goodbye to her father, she says that soldiers do not cry and her willingness to be like a soldier helps her stay strong and automatically helps her father stay stronger as well. Leslie Frost mentions that "a daughter's tears and her loving embraces can unman Captain Crewe to tears of his own, but her soft resolve to go through with the good-bye ritual can gird his loins for battle" (93). Sara's soldier-pretend puts her in control because she decides when her father leaves. As long as Sara cannot say goodbye, Captain Crewe cannot leave her but the moment she decides she is strong enough to say goodbye to him, Captain Crewe leaves quietly. Similarly, when Sara hears the news that her father died on the battlefield, she refuses to believe that he really died. If Sara had not kept this firm faith in her father's survival, she probably would not have continued to search for him and they would not have been reunited. In this way, Sara again takes control since she is the one who makes their reunion happen. Sara's firm belief in her imagination and her assumptions concerning her ideals allow her to take control in the film.

The imaginative stories Sara tells throughout the film are a tool for Sara to create an environment around her that allows her to cope with the events she is going through. Depending on the adaptation, Sara actively incorporates aspects of her imagination in her day-to-day life. In the nineties adaptation, Sara shows incredible faith in her own story as she draws a circle on the ground to console her sorrows, allowing herself to feel weak and sad in the protective circle. Similarly, Sara uses her imagination to scare Lavinia by cursing her. In the 1939 version, Sara does not use her imagination in her daily life but she does imagine a world in which she has the power to change the situations she cannot change in her real life, such as the forbidden relationship between Miss Rose and Geoffrey. Her imagination does strengthen her resolve which allows her to hold on to her ideology when she must say goodbye to her father and when she has to keep faith in her own ideas after her father supposedly died. Also, thirties Sara's tendency to act as though she is strong as she pretends to be a soldier is the reason she can decide when her father eventually leaves her at the seminary. In the 1917 adaptation, Sara's character is also given a position in the imagination sequence that reverses typical gender roles. Again, the imagination sequence is used to strengthen Sara's character as she is allowed to play a role that women usually do not play. The aspect of Sara's imagination is shown in a different manner in each film but these interpretations show different types of strengths and weaknesses Sara experiences because of her creative mind.

Insolent Stories, Indian Curses and Insurgent Behaviour:

The Refusal to Conform in the Twentieth-Century Adaptations of *A Little Princess*

The nineties film *A Little Princess* shows that Sara has to adapt to a society that stresses the importance of obedience and proper behaviour for young ladies. In the nineties film, when Sara first arrives at the school, the rest of the class is in the middle of a French class. Therefore, Sara is forced to stand in front of the class as she is introduced for the very first time. Miss Minchin mentions that "Our reputation for sending the most poised and charming young ladies into society is one of a kind" (00:08:16). This comment is combined with a take that shows how the girls sit up straight and smile brightly to live up to this description. Earlier in her life, Sara experienced living in India where she did not have to live according to the Western rules and she uses this knowledge to rebel against the societal norm that is imposed upon the young women at the seminary. Only in the nineties version are Sara's stories portrayed as a rebellion against the social rules which she shares with the rest of the girls and thus starts a rebellious wave that spreads through the seminary. Not necessarily because Sara's stories comment on their social boundaries but mainly because her stories are forbidden. Therefore, the students show resistance to the regime of the seminary by meeting in secret and encouraging Sara to tell her forbidden stories. This rebellion is less visible in the earlier adaptations and this partially stems from the different performances of Sara by the actresses Mary Pickford and Shirley Temple. Their interpretations of Sara focus more on her childlike behaviour in order to represent Sara as a bright little child rather than a smart young woman. This can be understood in relation to the concept mentioned by Hutcheon concerning adaptation theory, which is that changes to the story will happen because each film is influenced by social and cultural conventions (xviii). Thus, the nineties version of *A Little Princess* represents Sara's knowledge and behaviour as a tool to proceed with the struggle against social norms more so than in the earlier adaptations – adding an illustration of the

manner in which the nineties society viewed young girls' behaviour compared to popular opinion about children earlier in the twentieth century.

The attitude towards the girls in the nineties film could be considered a feminist satire as the film plays with the typical gender-specific rules concerning young girls. When Sara first enters the seminary, she is introduced to the rest of the students. The screen shows that the rest of the students are in disarray when Miss Minchin, Sara and Captain Crewe enter the room. The girls are all leaning back on their seats. It is only after Miss Minchin mentions that "Our reputation for sending the most poised and charming young ladies into society is one of a kind" (00:08:16) that the girls sit up straight, place their lower arms on the table and show dazzling smiles. This behaviour is entirely different from how they behaved before Minchin's comment. Throughout the film, the girls are shown picking their noses, yawning widely and sitting back lazily. In a way, these scenes critique stereotypical feminine ideals as the girls are not as poised and charming as Minchin says. They actually appear to be quite the opposite. Still, the society in the nineties film considers them poised young ladies because they are taught to be so in the seminary.

The nineties film shows that Sara's childhood in India is connected to her difficulty to adjust to the stereotype of the well-behaved young lady. The film starts with a scene in which Sara runs around in the jungle, wearing a simple white dress and nothing on her feet. Rosemary George mentions that "[i]n Cuaron's film, Sara's time in India is represented as an uncontaminated, innocent childhood. It is as if […] race and class are declared inactive" (147). Sara's upbringing in India appears to be free of any type of prejudice or rules. She takes this experience with her when she enrols at the seminary in New York. After Sara spends some time at the boarding school she is seen writing a letter to her father in which she mentions: "I never imagined there would be so many rules at school. I guess they are there for a purpose and I am trying hard to obey them but I get the feeling I am doing something

wrong" (00:15:24). This scene is shown after several scenes in which Sara either gets told off for doing something wrong or she watches someone else getting told off for failing the requirements of being a perfect young lady. Later in the film Sara speaks to Ermengarde and she finds out Ermengarde's father does not feel like he belongs to this world. When Sara inquires why her father sent Ermengarde, her friend responds that "He wants me to belong" (00:23:50). Sara seems puzzled as she does not understand why someone would want to belong to a world with so many rules. Used to a world without rules, Sara cannot bring herself to believe in the importance of these petty rules that she has so easily lived without until now.

In the nineties film, the manner in which Sara is shown to struggle with the realization that not everyone is as smart or wealthy as she is adds to the development of her character throughout the film. Sara grows up in a rich environment. The novel mentions that Sara "did not know all that being rich meant. She had always lived in a beautiful bungalow, and had been used to seeing many servants who made salaams to her and called her 'Missee Sahib', and gave her her own way in everything" (12). Sara has only known a wealthy life in which she could do whatever she wanted whenever she wanted. As far as Sara knows, everyone is as wealthy and smart as she is. When she arrives at the seminary in New York, Sara realizes that this is not true. The first moment this happens is when Sara sees Becky - the maid. Miss Minchin is showing Sara and her father around when Sara notices Becky, who is mopping the floor. The film slows down for a moment as Sara stops to stare at Becky - almost as if she cannot understand what she is seeing. The second moment in which Sara is confronted with someone less fortunate than she is, is when she watches Ermengarde struggle to live up to Miss Minchin's high expectations. Though it is not explicitly stated in the film that Sara is as bright as she is said to be in the novel, the film does show that Sara whispers the answer to the math question Ermengarde cannot answer. She whispers the answer with such intensity, as if she wants to mentally send the answer to Ermengarde and she seems disappointed when

nothing happens and Ermengarde sits down sadly. These confrontations with the reality that not everyone has such a life as Sara has had until now teach Sara the lesson that not everyone is as fortunate as she is which adds a life-lesson to Sara's story that will help her grow throughout the film.

In every version of *A Little Princess*, Sara copes with these type of difficult situations by using her imagination to alter the situation in her mind, but only in the nineties film is Sara's storytelling ability allowed to be an actual active part of the story. Throughout Cuaron's film, a second story-line is shown alongside Sara's journey. This storyline shows the story of Rama, a prince who is in love with Sita. His lover is taken hostage by an evil Ravana and prince Rama has to go through a dangerous journey to save her. Sara narrates this story at several different moments until the happy ending occurs before Sara gets her own happy ending. Sara takes the initiative to use the tale as a way of making her own life more interesting. Rosemary George mentions that "Sara, whose fluency in the uses of myths and story-telling in order to get her through some very rough days is not questioned, but showcased as a manifestation of her resourceful strength of mind and soul" (149). Sara is in charge of the *Ramayana* story and this automatically gives her more authority because she decides what happens in the story and she decides when the viewers hear the rest of the story. The fact that Sara can tell the *Ramayana* story herself shows that she gains a type of authority over both her own story and her own imagination.

The tale of *Ramayana* shows a correlation with Sara's life as well. Though she is not aware of these similarities herself, Sara's life corresponds to both Rama and Sita in different ways, which implies that she has similarities to both the saviour and the damsel in distress. The entire imaginative story can be seen as the representation of Sara's struggle against the norm of American society for young ladies. Jennifer McLaughlin mentions that "[t]he ideal woman did not argue or attempt to be too intellectual" (21). When Sara first enters the

seminary, she does both of these things. Her stories and her attitude have no place in the seminary. This can be seen when Sara imagines a new ending for the book that they are reading during their reading hour and Miss Minchin tells her that this is not allowed. The *Ramayana* begins with the moment that Sita is captured by the evil Ravana and locked up in a tower. Meanwhile, Sara has to stay at the seminary while her father goes to war. At the seminary, the seemingly evil Miss Minchin is in control and she constantly tries to supress Sara's imagination. The stories Sara tells strongly represent individualism and free spirit while these are aspects of the girls Minchin does not encourage in her seminary. Eventually, Sara is actually exiled to the attic, which makes a direct link to Sita's captivity in the tower. Much as Sita misses Rama, Sara is shown hugging the doll that is supposed to be a mental link to her father – conveying how much Sara misses her father. Moreover as Sara is stuck in the rules of her society, prince Rama is struck by poisonous arrows that numb his body and mind. Miss Minchin also tries to numb Sara's mind as she focuses on making Sara one of the poised young ladies that fits in perfectly in her seminary.

The *Ramayana* is shown to contain a dramatized version of Sara's story. The events that occur in the *Ramayana* correspond to what happens in Sara's life. This connects to the life of Frances Hodgson Burnett herself. In her biography of the author, Ann Thwaite mentions that Burnett tended to allow her imagination to take control of her. Thwaite states that "it was her lively imagination, not lack of spirit, that made her suffer. As she read more and more, her whole life became coloured by drama" (10). Her imagination made the events that happened in her life more extreme. Burnett feared that the police could throw her in prison for the smallest offences or that she could bring dishonour on her family for being unable to repay a half-penny debt. This can be seen to reflect how the *Ramayana* operates in *A Little Princess*, presenting an extreme version of what happens in Sara's life.

The story Sara tells could be considered a form of resistance against the societal rules

that she encounters in the seminary. George mentions that allowing Sara to tell this story shows that the story belongs to everyone (148) but this is not entirely true. In India, Sara tells the story while she is playing outside with her friends May and Laki because she has all the freedom in the world to speak her mind and use her imagination. However, in New York, Sara's stories are considered childish and foolish. Sara discovers this during a reading hour at the seminary. They read a novel every evening and Sara dislikes the book they are reading at the time. She decides to create her own ending but this action is stopped by Miss Minchin and the girls are sent to bed. Some of the girls ask Sara to continue her story as it is the most exciting story they ever heard. Sara tells her story in secret to the girls who want to hear it – this can be considered a form of resistance against the societal norm. This makes the fairy tale a secret - only passed from insider to insider with Sara as the ringleader. Sara's secret stories earn her friends and, more importantly, loyalty that will eventually be of very well use to her. George mentions that "Sara's enthusiasm for this epic and her ability to weave the story of Rama and Sita into her own autobiography are signs of her generous openness to all good stories" (148). More may be going on here than George allows for. Sara's stories represent much more since they are forbidden in her direct environment but she still persists in telling them and she even gathers a group of students around her at night to relay the forbidden stories, while clearly knowing this is not allowed. Thus, Sara's *Ramayana* story is a form of resistance against the societal norm that is imposed on her and her classmates in the seminary.

The *Ramayana* disappears from the storyline when Sara loses her faith in her stories and the magic. For a moment, it appears as if Rama and Sita are lost. Sita is locked up in the tower and Rama has died because of the poisonous arrows. Sara received the message that her father has died, she lost all her wealth and she has to move to the attic. The events that happened to Sara have broken her spirit, taken her confidence in her imagination and without Sara's imagination Rama and Sita cannot finish their story. As Sara struggles to find

happiness in her new situation, the *Ramayana* is lost. The oppression of society seems to have won. Sara lost her imaginative stories and she has submitted to the pressure of Miss Minchin's establishment. Stubborn, talkative Sara is temporarily reduced to a silent, obedient maid. This is made clear in a breakfast scene that shows a clear contrast with the first breakfast scene in the seminary. In the first instance Miss Minchin tells Sara to be quiet during breakfast to which Sara responds that doing that does not seem natural (00:14:15-00:14:25). The second time, Miss Minchin also tells Sara that she is not allowed to talk to the other girls while she serves their breakfast and this time Sara stays quiet, obeying Miss Minchin (00:34:47-00:35:00). This corresponds to how Sara finally submits to societal rules that women have to be quiet and subservient. For a while, Sara hardly says a word. She does not speak when she meets Ram Dass for the first time. She does not say anything when Lavinia walks right through Sara's just cleaned floor. Sara has been muted by society's rules and her imagination has been muted as well.

Sara appears defeated until she receives several opportunities that help her to find her own magic. Becky gives her the first opportunity by presenting Sara with a self-made pillow that shows a picture of what Becky imagines is India. Becky tells Sara that Sara's stories helped her when she thought she had nothing left to live for. The magic brought hope back to Becky's heart. When Sara responds that there is no magic, Becky leaves without saying another word. The camera stays on Sara and she seems to momentarily return to her old ideals as she attempts to communicate with her father, hoping that he is an angel in heaven who can send her messages as she told Lottie earlier in the film. However, she does not hear anything and her hopes falter again (00:36:47-00:38:00). In a later scene, Becky asks Sara to tell about India and Sara has to remind herself of her old life. This may have given her the chance to recall her old stories as well. Another opportunity is given by Ram Dass. In a magical scene, Sara's doors open by themselves and the Indian servant is standing in the window on the

opposite side of the street. Sara does not seem affected by the cold as she twirls around in the snow and Sara shows a smile for the first time since the scene in which Miss Minchin told Sara that her father died (00:43:15-00:44:32). This occurs immediately after the moment that Sara recalled her life in India and therefore it corresponds to Sara's tendency to refer to imagination and magic, making this scene appear even more magical.

After these two moments, Sara's steps back to her old imaginative self are slow. The first moment that appears is when Sara sees Miss Minchin throwing out a young chimney sweeper. This moment is followed by a scene in which Sara and Becky throw the ashes back down the chimney and so ruin Miss Minchin's room. Janice Kirkland filters this act away as "minor juvenile mischief" (200) but it can also be seen as a step towards Sara's old rebellion against society. It is the moment that Sara stops being a mindless maid and starts to think again. This can be seen by the manner in which Sara studies the buckets with ashes before she looks up and a plan develops in her mind. This is followed by another scene that contrasts to an earlier scene when Lavinia walked straight through the floor that Sara just cleaned and Sara does not say a word to her. This time, when Lavinia taunts Sara, the maid retaliates by using her imagination to scare Lavinia. These two steps help Sara remember her old ways and it is not long after this that Sara continues to tell her *Ramayana* tales. Just like how other characters helped Sara remember her old self, Rama is saved by a deer that gave its life to wake him back up. Sara's attic room is different now as the candles appear to give more light and Sara and Becky have created a secret code to convey whether or not "the demon Minchinweed is asleep" (00:48:51-00:48:53). Sara has fully incorporated her belief in magic and her imagination back into her life again.

After Sara regains her ideals, the *Ramayana* continues to show correspondences to her life. Rama finally confronts Ravana in the story and immediately followed by this sequence, Miss Minchin discovers that Sara has been secretly telling stories in the attic. Sara's rebellion

has been discovered by Miss Minchin. Like Rama and Ravana, Sara and Miss Minchin have one of their final combats. This is the first time that Sara speaks back to Miss Minchin. Before this Sara was always quiet when Minchin appeared, unable to look the teacher in the eyes. However, now her imagination and therefore her strength has returned to her, Sara can take the battle to Minchin. Sara is no longer silenced. After Sara seemingly wins that verbal battle against Minchin, her story continues to show how Rama manages to defeat Ravana and Sita and Rama are reunited. Society did not manage to supress Sara's imagination. The *Ramayana* received a happy ending and this strengthens Sara enough to show courage as she crosses the wooden plank to the other side of the street, finds her father and ensures her own escape from Minchin's oppressive society.

Just as Sara resists the boring books she has to read at school, she also resists being considered a maid when she loses her wealth and she has to work for a living. However, this resistance is not as central to the nineties film as it is to the 1986 version. In the eighties series, Sara receives money from Donald, her neighbour, but she refuses it at first. Only after Donald insists, does Sara accept the money and she uses it as a talisman to wear around her neck. She does not use this money to buy herself anything because she refuses to be on the receiving end of charity. It is not that Sara is independent of money, which can be seen when she finds some money later and uses it to buy food. This more concerns the fact that Sara is doing the saving rather than that she is saved by someone else. Sara Rothschild explains that "her grace and kindness toward him and her talisman-like treatment of what would be charity in a different situation show that she retains her position as a subject, not object" (36). Sara is not the damsel in distress who is saved by Donald. Rather, Sara is doing the saving as she makes sure that Donald feels better about himself for giving money to the poor. She maintains control over the situation by utilizing her imagination so that she can create a story-line in which the charity is actually a good luck charm.

In the nineties film, Sara does accept the charity given to her. Donald has no name in the nineties film but is only a stranger who comes across Sara and gives her money. Sara follows the rich boy and his mother - maybe to thank him or to give the money back; it is not clarified - and the mother exclaims: “Now we can’t get rid of her!” (00:39:30). This scene actually seems to emphasize Sara’s lower status and it does nothing to improve her position in the story. Sara uses the money to buy something to eat. This makes her an object. She is saved by the rich boy because he gave her some money so that she can now eat. However, nineties Sara changes her position from object to subject when she gives the bread she bought with the charity money to a starving young girl. Sara notices the starving family of four, consisting of a mother and three children. The screen shows how Sara looks from her only food to the starving family before she makes a decision and approaches the family. Sara gives the bread to the girl and this automatically changes her position from object back to subject. Sara shifts the charity from herself to someone else. She is no longer the one being saved but instead she is doing the saving.

Though the nineties film has deleted some aspects that give Sara strength in the earlier versions, the latest version of *A Little Princess* nonetheless adds more scenes that display a particular form of bravery in Sara’s character compared to the other films. In the nineties film Sara appears as a stronger character; not only mentally but also physically. Janice Kirkland mentions: “[t]o cater to a film audience that has been conditioned to stimuli of excitement and disaster, the film substitutes improbable melodrama” (199). To capture the attention of the easily distracted nineties crowd, several more exciting scenes were added to the film. For instance, when Sara goes out to do groceries, she is attacked by a boy who tries to steal her wallet. Sara does not back down but pushes the boy away and keeps her wallet. The fact that Sara can brush off an attack like that implies that she is quite strong and not afraid to fight for her belongings. Similarly, near the end of the film, Sara shows incredible courage as she

crosses over a wooden plank to get to the attic on the other side of the street. As the rain pours down on her, the plank shakes as she slowly crawls to the other side. Again, this scene does not occur in any of the earlier films, while it does show real courage on Sara's part. It seems that in the nineties film, Sara's courage is emphasized.

The most recent western version of *A Little Princess* emphasizes Sara's cleverness as she knows exactly what to say to calm down an angry Lottie. The nineties film shows a scene in which Lottie has a tantrum. Sara approaches Lottie and complains that it is difficult to study while Lottie is screaming. When Lottie responds that her mother is gone, Sara only states that she doesn't have a mother either (00:17:00). This silences Lottie and the younger girl looks up sadly. The statement seems to create a bond between the two immediately. Sara proceeds to tell a story about their mothers as angels in heaven, looking down upon their daughters (00:17:07). As Sara mentions that their mothers might send messages to them which cannot be heard if the girls are screaming all the time (00:18:17) - after which Lottie looks down in a somewhat ashamed manner – the film shows that Sara not only ensures that Lottie will be silent right now but she also prevents any future outbursts. Marian Brown mentions that "the appropriate choice of stories to tell to the other children demonstrates Sara's awareness of the interests of others" (203). The film not only explains whether Sara knows exactly what to say or whether she intuitively says these things, but it also shows how it takes effect on Lottie. The film also shows that the teachers are aware of Sara's effect on Lottie, since when Lottie starts screaming in the middle of the hallway later in the film, Miss Amelia decides to get Sara so that Sara can calm Lottie down. Miss Amelia trusts that Sara knows exactly what to do in this situation which shows that Sara's influence on the younger girl did not go unnoticed. All this shows that in the nineties film, Sara is someone who can adapt to the situation and use her intellect and imagination to change the situation.

Sara's behaviour in the nineties film is calmer compared to the earlier versions; she is

also treated quite differently by the rest of the characters compared to the earlier versions and the novel itself. In the thirties version, Sara is treated better than the rest of the students. She gets to sit next to Miss Minchin during meals, she gets a personal teacher who teaches her how to ride her horse and Miss Rose comes in to help her from time to time. In the 1986 version, Sara has a personal maid and she gets to wear better clothing than the rest of the girls. In the nineties version, Sara gets no special treatment at all. She gets the best room, like the other films, and she receives her doll and toys, but she does not have a personal maid. Sara does not get to sit next to Miss Minchin and she walks at the end of the line during walks. The nineties film takes it even further as Miss Minchin is quite strict towards Sara. When Sara runs late, Miss Minchin states that Sara cannot expect the rest of the seminary to wait for her (00:13:04). The nineties film is the only film in which Miss Minchin explicitly states that the girls in her seminary are taught to behave in a certain way. They are supposed to be poised and charming young women. In order to become one of these poised young ladies, Sara has to adjust and behave just like the rest of the group. Sara has to dress in exactly the same way. She has to go to the same classes and she walks at the back of the line. Sara is not allowed to stand out because Miss Minchin wants her students to all behave in the same way.

In the nineties film, the adult characters show a tendency to listen to adults rather than to the children. Miss Minchin calls the police because she thinks Sara stole all the beautiful decorations that Ram Dass secretly placed in Sara's room. Sara sneaks to the house across the street to escape from the police. There she finds her father. The officers come in and take her away but Sara tells them Captain Crewe is her father. Miss Minchin interferes and says Sara has no father, which the two officers take as the truth. Everyone continues to ignore Sara's words as she calls for her father. It is only when Captain Crewe appears and calls her name that the officers release Sara. This scene shows that there is a tendency to believe only the words of the adults. The officers first take Minchin's words as the truth over Sara's and they

do the same when Captain Crewe says the exact opposite. Meanwhile, they ignore what Sara says. Another instance of this tendency occurs in one of the first scenes when Miss Minchin tells Sara that she is not allowed to wear jewellery, but Sara returns that she would like to wear it only in her room. Miss Minchin states" Well, if you absolutely insist" (00:08:30-00:08:33) and her gaze focuses on Captain Crewe, signalling that she is asking the other adult here and not Sara. Crewe, however, gives the word back to Sara by allowing her to make the decision herself. This briefly shows how Minchin's views on a young girl's opinion clashes with the environment in which Crewe raised Sara. Minchin assumes that Captain Crewe will state what Sara wants because he is the adult and therefore he knows this better than Sara.

In the 1917 film, Mary Pickford's Sara behaves as the perfect romantic child. Cvetkovic mentions that "Pickford […] had established a successful formula for images of childhood in films" (21). Pickford's Sara is sweet, cheerful and mischievous. She dances on the table, forgets everything as she tells her stories and pouts and cries when the situation requires it. Cvetkovic continues: "Pickford's Sara behaves in ways totally at odds with Burnett's grave, old-fashioned, and queer little girl" (18). Still she also acknowledges that "[Pickford] created an archetype of American girlhood that audiences clamoured to see" (21). Though Pickford's Sara may not be an accurate impersonation of the original Sara, her Sara does correspond to the wishes of her contemporary audience. She played in many different rags-to-riches films and developed a successful way to portray a child. Mainly because this type of behaviour was appreciated by the early twentieth-century audience, Pickford strayed away from the original Sara's behaviour and portrayed a somewhat more childish representation of Sara.

Like Pickford's Sara, Shirley Temple's Sara is quite different from the original Sara described in the novel because the thirties audience preferred to see a more childish type of behaviour. Kirkland mentions that "Hitler was marching across Europe in 1939; with this in

mind, the screenwriters apparently wanted to create a happy film to offset the bleakness of reality" (197). Therefore, Temple's Sara had to be enjoyable to watch and therefore she needed to show more emotions than the original Sara would. Kirkland says, "Gone is the Sara Crewe who has the strength to repress her anger […] Shirley pouts and stamps her feet and later does a tap dance at the hospital while looking for her father" (197). Shirley's Sara was written for entertainment purposes only. This means that she had to dance, laugh and joke around in order to entertain the audience. This is a contrast to the original thoughtful Sara whom is described as too old for her age in the novel. The different type of behaviour displayed by Shirley Temple's Sara in the 1939 version of *A Little Princess* can be explained by the preference of the audiences of that time.

In the eighties, the focus on girl culture and the emphasis on a girl's own space corresponds to the series of *A Little Princess* that aired at that time. Linda Duits discussed that in the eighties films there was a realization that girls did not have their own space, unless the bathroom and bedroom counted (17). Therefore, there was a longing for girls-only areas in the eighties films. Linda Duits mentions that "female authors therefore call for the creation of all-girls spaces" (17). In Duits' article this call for all-girls spaces is meant for the contemporary society and not necessarily for films. However, the eighties *A Little Princess* series does cater to this request as there are several places that only girls can enter in the series. First of all, there is the seminary in which all the girls can move without supervision and there are very few men inside the seminary. The male visitors are accompanied by a female character every time. For example, Captain Crewe is always accompanied by either his daughter or both his daughter and miss Minchin. Similarly, Ram Dass is only in the attic when Sara is present as well and he can only enter after she invited him in. Another space is the bakery. Again, this is a room in which only women enter: Sara, the female baker and Anne. The *A Little Princess* series that aired in the eighties corresponds to the needs for the all-girls space that was

apparent at that time.

In her article about the manner in which the character Sara has changed over the years, Vibiana Cvetkovic mentions that "[Sara] has been unqueered" (15) and thus, Sara has been changed from the person who is "markedly different in looks and demeanor from her peers" (15) and she has been assimilated into the rest of her peers. However, this statement overlooks the manner in which Sara represents the different types of child images that were preferred in each decade. The representation of Sara's character depends heavily on the visions on childlike behaviour of the contemporary society in which films are published. In the nineties, Sara is treated in a different manner because in the nineties film the focus is placed on Sara's difficulties with the social system of the seminary. In the nineties film, Sara's imagination is used as a tool to represent Sara's constant struggle against the social standards that Miss Minchin tries to impose on her. This struggle is absent in the earlier adaptation and Sara's imagination in general tended to be used as a colourful addition to the storyline rather than as an actual storyline by itself. This can be seen by the manner in which her stories about the *Ramayana* disappear from the storyline when Sara temporarily loses her faith in her imagination. Though, this appears to be about Sara's imagination, it is as much about her faith in her own ideology and how powerful she feels as the subject in her own life. Through her stories, nineties Sara can decide what happens to her own life because she makes it appear more interesting or more tragic or happy than it really is. It gives agency back to Sara. As Sara's loses the control over her life, her stories falter as well, until Sara regains control. Sara's control over her own life is considered important in the nineties version. Contrary to the earlier adaptations, in the nineties film Sara's resourcefulness and imagination is used as a tool to illustrate a young girl's resistance to the social system.

Chapter 3. Friendship, Empowerment and Social Impact: Portraying the Contemporary Significance of a Community in the Western filmic adaptations of *A Little Princess.*

In the children's book *A Little Princess*, the main character is introduced as a girl who does not need friends as long as she has her books to read. This aspect of Sara's character seems to have been deleted in the nineties film. Susan Applebaum mentions that director Cuarón "foregrounded the progressive aspects of Sara's character and focused on themes relevant to late twentieth-century America […] the power of community and friendship among women" (83). The nineties film focuses on the friendships Sara engages in during her stay at the seminary and how they benefit her as she loses her wealth. One main difference from the earlier adaptations is that nineties Sara seems to make friendships that are based on the willingness to be friends while older adaptations tend to show a Sara who makes deals concerning social relationships. Also, the other girls have their own personalities, histories and motivation in the nineties film. Becky does not get mesmerized by Sara's presence but challenges Sara throughout the film. Ermengarde allows Sara's influence to change her from a misfit to a leader. Sara learns that friendships can bring her more than any book can. The question is whether these additions to the supporting characters alter the representation of the main character. Depending on the viewpoint, this may be true, but Sara also gains social lessons from her friends and eventually her presence at the seminary changes the entire group. The nineties Sara shows the values of the late twentieth-century by interacting with her community and thus reinforcing her own impact on her acquaintances.

In the eighties series, Sara considers her social relationships as deals she makes in which she tends to try to secure a dominant position. The novel suggests that Sara has no need for friends as long as she has her books. This implies that friends are a novelty for her and therefore she appears not to know how to establish a functional friendship. Elisabeth Gruner

mentions that “Sara, functions explicitly as a role model and a teacher for several of the girls” (164). At the height of her wealth, Sara befriends only the girls for whom she can act as a role model and thus maintains a commanding position in her relationships. Ermengarde is the first friend she meets at the seminary. When Ermengarde tells Sara she has no friends, Sara offers a deal in which Sara will help Ermengarde with her studies if Ermengarde in return provides Sara with company whenever she is lonely. In this way, Sara is in complete control because she provides Ermengarde with a service nobody else can give her while Sara is not dependent on Ermengarde’s friendship. Sara calls their agreement a “bargain” (00:21:26) because that is what she thinks it is. The friendship with Lottie starts similarly. Lottie misses her mother dearly so Sara offers to fill the position of Lottie’s mother until Lottie is old enough to live without a mother. Automatically, Sara fulfils an authoritative position as she pretends to be Lottie’s mother. When Sara receives a letter while she is entertaining Lottie and she tells Lottie to leave so she can read her letter, Lottie obeys and leaves the room. Their interaction shows that Sara has the authority in the situation and she behaves accordingly to this agreement. Sara has a similar agreement with Becky. Sara promises to give Becky something to eat when she realizes Becky is often forced to miss meals. Becky remembers this and when a letter for Sara arrives, Becky decides to bring it to Sara personally, hoping to get something to eat in return. Sara has gained Becky’s loyalty just by offering the possibility of food to the maid. Thus, Sara maintains a position of authority in all her friendships as she considers her social relations as bargains for company and loyalty.

Compared to the eighties series, these friendships are represented in an entirely different manner in the nineties film. This could have to do with the general idea that surfaced in the nineties concerning the power of a community for women. Renate Klein explains “[sisterhood] is, in fact, our lifeline, which we cannot afford to sever” (131). This ideology is carried over into the film since Sara gains friends whom befriend her on equal status and

therefore can easier form a bond with her. Sara befriends Ermengarde because they both appear to be outcasts. This can be seen when Sara has nobody to stand in the line with and she decides to stand next to Ermengarde, who is also alone. The two do not make a bargain as the one does in the eighties series. Sara does teach Ermengarde how to say a particular French phrase and she proceeds to watch with a smile as Ermengarde impresses her father (00:23:36-00:24:27). Sara does not offer to become Lottie's mother but instead offers her stories as a comfort. The fact that Sara has no authority over Lottie can be seen in a scene that occurs after Sara loses her wealth. Lottie approaches Sara to ask if she is still a princess. Sara sends Lottie away but Lottie persists until Miss Minchin chases her away (00:38:28-00:38:38). Concerning Becky, she does receive new shoes from Sara but this does not mean Becky is immediately loyal to Sara. She continues to avoid speaking to Sara until Sara is a servant herself. Only when the two are of equal status, Becky decides to talk to her. All in all, when comparing the nineties Sara and the eighties Sara, it can be seen that eighties Sara considers her friendships as business deals in which she has to have the authority while nineties Sara makes friends because she already has a particular bond with these girls.

In the nineties version of *A Little Princess*, the constant struggle between Lavinia and Sara is represented in their respective gazes, which are utilized as the ultimate weapons for girls that are expected to behave in a civilized manner. The relationship between Sara and Lavinia is tense from the moment they meet. Sara meets Lavinia's gaze and they hold each other's gaze as if they are challenging each other. A similar situation occurs during the daily reading hour as Sara must take over the book from Lavinia and the two again hold each other's gaze until Sara moves away. Yet another instance of this behaviour occurs after Sara loses her wealth. Sara is cleaning the floor and Lavinia walks right over the still wet floor before she stops and looks over at Sara. The two hold each other's gaze for only a moment. Rothschild mentions that in the novel, Sara tends to use her gaze as a weapon: "[t]his may be

seen as a defensive act, but Sara's gaze is a pre-emptive strike and as such shows Sara on the offensive. She renders Lavinia powerless by her gaze" (34). Sara's gaze is presumed to be powerful enough to render someone else powerless. In this film, Lavinia is not rendered powerless by Sara's gaze but she engages Sara's gaze instead. In the nineties version of *A Little Princess*, the gaze is represented as a weapon that girls can use to wage a silent war on each other.

The nineties film is the only adaptation that includes a scene in which Sara and Lavinia become friends, which shows the nineties desire to recognize the importance of a community. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the conflict between the two characters appears to be mainly about their individual willpower. As for Lavinia, her authority could be determined by her control over a certain number of students. The nineties film shows a scene in which a student brushes Lavinia's hair and a small group of girls watches while this happens (00:26:00). In this same scene one of the other girls decides that she cannot choose this scenario over the excitement of Sara's stories anymore: "[I] don't care what you say about Sara's stories, they have got to be more fun than watching your hair being brushed" (00:26:04). Lavinia proceeds to say that anyone who feels the same way should leave too and she widens her eyes in shock and anger when everyone leaves. A moment later the scene switches to Sara's room where Lavinia's followers join the rest of Sara's friends to hear her stories. Though the film does not show whether or not Lavinia lost all her friends permanently, Lavinia's attitude towards the rest of the students has changed because of Sara's presence and this is shown at the end of the film as Lavinia hugs Sara and proceeds to exchange smiles with her enemy. Lavinia's change in response to her loss of prestige in the seminary shows that she realized her behaviour does not grant her friends or proper loyalty. Lavinia's change of behaviour occurs because the nineties film stresses the importance of a community and therefore nineties Lavinia is influenced by her position in her own community

more than the earlier versions of Lavinia had been.

The creators of the nineties film add post-feminist ideals to the film by allowing Sara's nemesis Lavinia to choose to reconcile her differences with Sara. The difficult relationship between Sara and Lavinia is shown in each adaptation. However, the nineties version is the only version in which Sara and Lavinia settle their dispute. In the 1917 version, Sara and Lavinia do not speak to each other at all. The only moment in which Lavinia's resentment towards Sara is shown is when Lavinia ridicules the fact that Sara leaves the table without eating: "She's too good to eat with us?" (00:09:47-00:09:54), and their bad relationship is left unresolved. Similarly, in the thirties film the relationship between Sara and Lavinia is only used as a sub-story in which the two girls sometimes clash but Lavinia is mainly shown talking about Sara when Sara is not in the room. In the eighties series, the relationship between Sara and Lavinia is shown in more depth. The two girls still do not clash in person as they do in the nineties film. Again, Lavinia is shown talking about Sara behind her back more often than that Lavinia actually speaks to Sara and, again, their bad relationship is left unresolved. Only in the nineties version does Lavinia choose to make peace with Sara. Lavinia's decision to change her relationship to Sara may stem from post-feminist influences. Yvonne Tasker mentions that "[c]hoice is a central term within post-feminist cinema, although there are clear and relatively conventional choices to be made by female characters in contemporary Hollywood cinema" (74). Though Tasker mentions that the choices available are often conventional and Lavinia only has two options – continue her war with Sara or make peace with Sara – the nineties adaptation is the only film in which Lavinia choses the second option as the other adaptations did not even include the choice.

Nineties Sara's influence on the girls at the seminary strengthens their bond as they go on a dangerous mission to save Sara's necklace. Sara's generosity in the height of her wealth is repaid to her when she becomes a maid. Rothschild mentions that "girls can help girls and

[…] a female community can be sustaining through hard times" (31). This is exactly what the nineties film conveys as the girls of the seminary are brought closer together to help their friend in need. Minchin takes Sara's necklace – it contains a picture of her late mother. Sara's friends decide to take the necklace back and they go on a mission to steal the necklace back from Miss Minchin's office. While Lottie distracts Miss Amelia, Ermengarde leads the rest of the group to Minchin's office and they have a tensed search through the office. Even Becky helps as she distracts Miss Minchin when the latter of the two returns to her office earlier than expected and the students are still in the room. Becky is only a maid and therefore she runs the risk of being sent away to live on the streets if she breaks the rules of the seminary. Her sacrifice is seen by the other girls and next time they see her they greet her as a friend. The girls present their treasure to Sara and they narrate the tale as if they have been through a great and dangerous mission for their friend: "'Princess Sara, we would like to present you with something we rescued.' 'It was a dangerous adventure.' 'Our very own crusade.' 'Risking all of our lives.'" (00:55:55-00:56:03). This situation serves as a means to bring the group closer together. Aside from that the girls also feel strengthened because they lived through such a dangerous situation. Ermengarde used to feel like an outcast but now she is the leader of the group. Becky was ignored by everyone before Sara arrived but now belongs to the group as well. The girls may have helped Sara by giving her back her necklace but in return they received a new type of positive atmosphere amongst themselves. Sara's influence brings the girls of the seminary closer together as they are inspired by her generosity and this strengthens their relationship.

In the nineties film, Sara not only improves the relationship between the other girls but she also influences the girls' impression of their own self-worth. In one of the first scenes of the film, Sara enters a seminary that is strictly ruled by Miss Minchin. In a way, Sara's strength can be found in the way she influences the rest of the group. Her presence changes

the seminary even after she leaves. This can be seen by the difference between the manner in which she is greeted when she arrives and the situation that occurs when she leaves the seminary. When Sara arrives, she is greeted with passive hostility. The girls stare at her as if they are sizing her up. In a later scene, the girls are shown gossiping about Sara in her absence, discussing her wealth and her family. All in all, the girls are not necessarily shown in a positive manner when one of the girls mentions her deceased aunt and several others respond that they do not care about her aunt. This is quite different from the situation that is shown when Sara leaves the seminary. The group is seen playing around outside before they all run closer to greet Sara. The young heiress leaves behind her doll Emily as a symbol for her presence, reminding the rest of the girls of the empowerment and excitement they experienced when Sara was still present at the seminary. Miss Amelia left earlier in the film to be with her lover and Miss Minchin is fired from her position. The film does show that Miss Minchin's name has been replaced by Mister Randolph's name on the front of the school but this does not imply that he will do anything more than financially supporting the school. The fact that there is no teacher to be seen on the screen implies that there are no teachers at the seminary anymore. The girls do not need anyone to tell them how to behave anymore because Sara's presence taught them that they can decide their own behaviour for themselves. In a way, Sara's presence changed the seminary and actually helped the girls become the sophisticated, independent young women they were intended to be in the beginning but they reached this goal on their own terms.

In the 1917 silent film, the relationship between Sara and her friends is represented differently from the other adaptations because the 1917 version of *The Little Princess* was created for a different reason. The 1917 version is focused mainly on Sara – more so than the rest of the adaptations. This could be because the actress who played Sara, Mary Pickford, was very popular at the time. Paula Cohen mentions that Mary Pickford was one of the first

film stars known to the general public and since the audience wanted to see Mary Pickford, longer films were created so that Pickford could get more screen time (37). If the directors of *The Little Princess* directed the film with that same idea in mind, it seems quite logical that the main focus is placed on Pickford playing Sara. The 1917 version of the *The Little Princess* was part of a 'little Mary' series that Pickford was allowed to produce and star in. She received these series because her performance skills brought her fans from all over the world. The people would go to the cinema to watch a film about her and therefore this film appears to focus on showcasing Pickford and her acting skills rather than on the relationships between the characters in the film.

Another striking difference in the development of a character is the role of Becky in the nineties film compared to the earlier versions. Rosemary George mentions that "[Becky] does not fawn over young Sara in the manner of her predecessors, rather she is quite self-possessed" (151). At first, when confronted with Sara's imagination, Becky appears to consider it the typical stories of a rich girl. Becky seems to have no interest in being Sara's friend seeing as when Sara approaches Becky, the servant tells Sara to leave. The two develop a secret relationship at first, as Becky is not allowed to speak to the girls, and it is only after Sara loses her wealth that their relationship blossoms. Becky not only provides Sara with friendship but she also encourages Sara to continue believing in her imagination even after Sara appears to give up doing so. This occurs when the two maids sit on Sara's bed and Becky tells her, "I sometimes thought I would die before I heard about the magic" (00:37:23-00:37:40). In this way, Becky plays an important role in keeping Sara's imagination alive. In the older versions, Becky plays the part of a side-kick but in the nineties version the two friends appear as a team. They form a team to punish Miss Minchin by throwing ashes down her chimney, they are seen giggling together as they do the dishes and they fall asleep together one particularly hungry night after they imagined a feast for themselves. In the

nineties film, the relationship between Sara and Becky is shown in more detail than in the older adaptations.

The fact that Becky is an African-American girl in the nineties film does not necessarily suggest that the nineties film is about the interracial friendship between Sara and Becky. The nineties Becky is the first non-white Becky and this led to speculation about the goal of the friendship between Becky and Sara. Rosemary George suggests that "the plot of the 1995 film revolves around this interracial friendship" (151). In a way, the film does revolve around the friendship between Becky and Sara but that is also the case in the eighties version and the original novel. The only difference between the earlier adaptations is that nineties Becky is African-American and that this is noticed in the film when Lottie mentions: "'That's Becky. She's not allowed to talk to us.' Sara: 'Why not?' Lottie: 'She's a servant girl and she has dark skin.' Sara: 'So?' Lottie: 'Well, doesn't that mean something?'" (00:18:30-00:18:41). While the rest of the girls assume Becky is an outcast because she has dark skin, Sara disregards popular opinion and instead decides to give Becky a chance. The *A Little Princess* story is known for advocating the idea that everyone is valuable regardless of their outer appearance or actual wealth. The fact that Sara does not care about Becky's ethnicity only emphasizes this trait.

The emphasis on the social relationships Sara encounters is different in every adaptation, mainly because it depends on whether or not that contemporary society valued the development of friendships between characters. In the early 1900s the emphasis was mainly on the lead characters since film was still a new innovation and the director was more interested in showing off Pickford's skills than in properly representing the relationships between the girls on the seminary. Similarly, in the thirties the focus was mainly on Shirley Temple so that she could entertain the audience with her smiles, laughs, and dances. The eighties series represents the different social relationships Sara encounters but it does not

divert from the original novel. Only the nineties version focuses on these different relationships Sara has and how they improve her story. This is mainly because the social values in the nineties were more focused on the strength of a community surrounding a character and this is portrayed in the nineties adaptation of the *A Little Princess* story. A comparison of the manner in which the social relationships in the *A Little Princess* adaptations are represented shows that the two most recently created films focus more on the friendships between the characters as the community surrounding a female character was of significance near the end of the twentieth century.

Heroine or Female Hero?

The Reversal of Gender Stereotypes in the *A Little Princess* Adaptations

The different filmic adaptations of the book *A Little Princess* were created in different periods and therefore the representation of both the male and female roles are shown in a different manner in each film. Frances Hodgson Burnett's original novel was first acclaimed for the feminist perspectives incorporated into the story. Throughout the years, the filmic adaptations represented different versions of this story and, depending on how they showed it, some female characters who originally were important to the novel were crossed out and diminished to minor characters or deleted entirely. Also, several aspects that made Sara an independent and smart girl have been altered to lessen these positive traits, such as how Sara's 'princess pretend' is supposed to be her own idea, though this is not conveyed in the nineties version. In this chapter, the representation of the male and female characters will be the focus. Though it is difficult to say whether or not the gender-specific aspects are empowering for both the male or female characters or not, every adaptation was created in a different era and therefore has to conform to different stereotypes in order to empower its characters.

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *A Little Princess*, Sara gains strength from pretending that she is a princess and therefore she has to behave in as poised and sweet a way as a princess would despite her difficult journey; however, in the nineties film Sara does not come up with this idea herself. In most adaptations, Sara's idea that all women are princesses is something she imagines herself. Only in the nineties version, Sara is inspired by someone else to think that every girl can be a princess. In one of the first scenes of the nineties film, Sara discusses princesses with Maya. The Indian woman tells a story about her own prince and when Sara asks if she has ever met real princes or princesses, Maya continues: "All women are princesses. It is our right" (00:02:09). This is the first moment that the idea of pretending to be a princess is suggested to Sara. In a following scene Sara suggests this notion to her father and asks if Maya is right. Captain Crewe confirms it and tells Sara that "[she] will always be my little princess" (00:03:32). In a way, this could be seen as a confirmation of Captain Crewe's power over Sara because she is only a princess because Crewe tells her that she is. However, Sara was first inspired by Maya. The fact that Sara even thinks that she may be a princess is because Maya suggested it to her first. When Sara first suggests this idea to Crewe, he responds that Maya is a very wise woman and he seems to go along with Maya's story in order to soothe Sara's thoughts. He starts by saying that "[y]ou can be anything you want to be [...] as long as you believe" (00:03:26) and this gives power to Sara as he already confirms that no matter what he or anyone else says, she can be whatever she wants. When Sara asks what he believes, Crewe responds with what he knows Sara wants him to say - namely that she is indeed a princess. Sara's tendency to pretend to be a princess may be inspired by others in the nineties film but her ideology is based on the fact that she can be whatever she wants to be and this empowers Sara.

Another great influence on Sara is her mother but her mother's presence is only apparent in the nineties version. Elisabeth Gruner mentions that "[she] is aided by her

mother's spirit or by some tangible token of her mother" (171). In the nineties film, Sara receives a necklace with a picture of her mother in the medallion. The necklace can be considered a symbol of her mother's presence. Sara uses the necklace as a talisman and refuses to discard it. When Miss Minchin states that jewellery is not allowed at school, Sara negotiates permission to keep it so she can wear it in her room. Miss Minchin appears to realize that Sara draws strength from her necklace because this is one of the first things Minchin takes away from Sara. While it is suggested that Minchin sells all her other belongings, Minchin keeps Sara's necklace locked in her desk – close to her. Minchin should believe that Sara will never regain her wealth so Minchin would never have a reason to return the necklace to her. The fact that Minchin wants the necklace to be in her desk – close to her – suggests that Minchin wants to keep the necklace as some form of talisman as well; drawing strength from Sara's imagination and automatically drawing strength from Sara's mother. Similarly, when Sara's friends try to rescue Sara's necklace they feel empowered by their mission. These examples show that the necklace with the picture of Sara's mother in it has a positive influence on female characters and thus functions as a talisman to empower both Sara, her friends and Miss Minchin.

In the nineties film, Miss Minchin does not treat Sara as kindly as she does in earlier adaptations and this may stem from the social struggle that is portrayed in the film. In every filmic adaptation Sara strays from Miss Minchin's rules and social rules in general but in the nineties film Sara rebels against the social rules Minchin tries to instil in her pupils. This struggle starts the moment that Sara arrives at the school. Miss Minchin tells Sara that jewellery is not allowed and therefore she is not allowed to wear her necklace. Jewellery could be used by the girls to express their individual taste but individualism is not something Minchin encourages in her students. Therefore, Minchin attempts to make sure that Sara knows this right away. Later in the film, Sara tries to speak during breakfast and Miss

Minchin quickly silences her. The headmistress states that they are not allowed to speak while they are eating. Even later in the film, during the daily reading hour, Sara changes the course of a story that the class is reading because she does not like where the story is going. Minchin again shuts this down, saying that imagination has no place there. Individualism, imagination and outspokenness are not appreciated in Minchin's seminary. The girls all have to look, behave and think the same, which emphasizes the focus on the importance of a community that was present in the nineties. This is not necessarily represented as a bad thing but it is something Sara finds difficult to adjust to. Gary Kamiya stated that the nineties Sara does not display the "sense of consummate dignity, of noblesse oblige, of stoic resistance to adversity, that makes Burnett's Sara truly a 'little princess'" (*San Francisco Examiner* website). However, Sara's resistance to Minchin's rules shows exactly this dignity and this resistance. Therefore, it is mainly in this film that Minchin really tries to impose these rules on Sara. Sara is the only student who refuses to obey to these rules at first. The social struggle that occurs during Sara's first few months at the seminary is mainly because Sara does not submit to Miss Minchin's type of society at first. Sara's resilience stems mostly from her ideology that she can do and think whatever she wants, which is an ideology she can have because she always got what she wanted until now.

It is only after Sara's loss of her wealth that she temporarily submits to the perfect society miss Minchin created on the seminary. The film shows a sequence of scenes in which Sara displays the behaviour Minchin desires. She no longer believes in her stories, which she states to Becky one night in the cold attic. Sara does not speak in the presence of the rest of the girls anymore and she no longer talks back to Minchin. The nineties film includes a scene where Sara is gathering the fallen leaves out the front door of the seminary. Lottie tries to talk to Sara but Sara only tells her to leave. The moment that happens right after this brief conversation displays the changed dynamics between Sara and Minchin. The headmistress

appears out of nowhere and tells Lottie to leave. The moment Minchin appears, the screen briefly flashes to show that Sara flinches at her voice. The brief moment that Sara freezes in response to Minchin's voice shows that Sara is scared of Minchin, which presents a completely different type of Sara. Her resistance faltered together with the loss of her wealth. The individualism, ideology and outspokenness Sara was known for is absent completely after she is turned into a maid. In a way, this shows that Minchin's comment that "that [Sara's statement that she changes a story when it does not suit her] is easy to say for a child who has everything" (00:21:56-00:22:00) might be true. When Sara loses everything she also realizes how difficult it is to maintain her own view of the world around her. However, it does not take Sara long to recover the attitude that she was known for.

In the nineties version, Captain Crewe does not die but he suffers from amnesia. Crewe gets hurt on the battlefield and he is transported back to a hospital, his memory lost. This implies a certain vulnerability and this aspect of the nineties film corresponds to several other films that were published in the nineties. According to Brent Malin, there were several nineties films that "offer[ed] visions of masculinity that may work against traditional, dominant notions" (244). One example is the film *Junior* (1994) which depicts a man who gets pregnant after testing a fertility drug. Another film that screened in the nineties was *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) in which a police detective goes undercover on a kindergarten and realizes he likes teaching up to the point that he considers changing professions. Even *Titanic* (1997) is mentioned as an example because the leading male role is shown as a sensitive young man. Malin continues to argue that "identity is held up through a series of arbitrary conventions reiterated from one moment to the next" (240) and only by "troubling these conventions […] can we begin to break out of these established and too often problematic notions of identity, 'subversive performances' such as drag shows helping to […] topple [these conventions]" (240). The films in which a man shows vulnerability, gets pregnant or

spends the entire film taking care of children can be considered as incorporating these subversive performances, which cause a reconsideration of stereotypical gender roles.

There is also a reversal of typical gender stereotypes present in both the nineties film and the thirties film as Sara is the person who saves her father. In the thirties and the nineties film, Sara's father survives the war but is hospitalized due to battle wounds and amnesia. In the thirties film, Sara finds her father in the hospital. She tries to make him remember her but he does not seem to be able to at first until her voice triggers his memory. Similarly, in the nineties film, Sara finds her father in the neighbour's house. She hugs her father with the same passion as the thirties Sara but in the nineties adaptation Crewe does not remember her at all and allows the police to take Sara away. It is only after he thinks for a moment that he realizes he really does know Sara and he follows her outside. In both cases, Sara finds her father and she is the main reason that Crewe regains his memory. Deborah Scally suggests that "the immediate assumption that a male hero is subject and the female is object injects stereotypical patriarchal sex-roles" (52). This is exactly the opposite in the two films since Sara is the one who saves Captain Crewe. Therefore, Sara becomes the subject while Crewe is the object. The stereotypical patriarchal gender-roles Scally mentioned are thus reversed in the nineties and thirties films as Sara saves her father and she therefore becomes the subject.

The scene in which Sara's simple attic room is transformed to a beautiful room is subtly changed in the nineties version which gives more power to Sara and reduces Ram Dass's skills. In the earlier adaptations, the films make it quite obvious that Ram Dass is the one who transforms her room. In most films, the Indian servant's house is quite close to the seminary and therefore the notion that Ram Dass decorated Sara's room herself while she was asleep seems more plausible. However, in the nineties film Sara's room is not as easy to reach for him. The distance is made painfully clear when Sara has to crawl along a plank to reach his house. The nineties version is the only version in which Ram Dass makes no appearance

whatsoever right before Sara's room is transformed. Sara and Becky imagine themselves a feast the night before the transformation and when they wake up the following morning, their room has changed. This suggests that it was their imagination which magically created the beautiful furniture and delicious foods. A brief scene of the Indian man glancing sideways, watching Sara and Becky enjoying their feast before he smiles is the only indication that he may know more about this. In the eighties adaptation Ram Dass is shown appearing in front of Sara's closed window when she is asleep and the following morning her window is half open and the room has been decorated. The same thing is shown in the thirties version as the screen shows a sleeping Sara and Ram Dass who appears at her window, looking inside. Rosemary George mentions that Sara's "uses of myth and story-telling […] is not questioned, but showcased as a manifestation of her resourceful strength of mind and soul" (149). Compared to the earlier adaptations, the suggestion that Sara truly performed magic and transformed her room on her own is quite present in the nineties. Sara's imagination is showcased as being the reason that she now has magical powers. This gives agency to Sara as her imagination has now taken the step to influencing her surroundings while she had no control over the situation at first.

Ram Dass has a much more important role in the nineties version compared to the earlier adaptations. Rosemary George states that: "Ram Dass's gaze is always gentle and nonaggressive; his very purpose in life seems to be to soothe and comfort, as he does for his master, then for Sara, and finally for her father" (147). Though the Indian servant indeed comforts all the characters mentioned by George, this does not necessarily seem to be his purpose. The manner in which the man appears on screen suggests that he knows more about the events than the rest of the characters. He first appears on the ship where he sees Sara and Captain Crewe together, which will be important later on in the film. The Indian man persuades his boss to take care of Captain Crewe. He is the one who notices that Sara leaves

the rose at his master's house and he is the one who contacts Sara first as he wakes her up at night, automatically showing her the way in which she later tries to escape from the police. Lastly, Ram Dass is the one who knows that Captain Crewe is Sara's father and he stands next to Crewe near the ending of the film, helping him remember his daughter. Some of these scenes appear in the earlier adaptations as well. In both the thirties and eighties version he also appears to know more than most characters but this fact is emphasized more in the nineties film. In the thirties film, Ram Dass secretly decorates Sara's room and he shows her the way to his house which she will use later when she tries to run from the police. In the eighties version, the Indian servant is the one who keeps mentioning the little servant girl to Mister John. He acts as a guide but he does not give the characters all the answers right away. Still, Ram Dass as an independent character whom guides Sara through the film is emphasized in the nineties version -giving him the role of a spiritual guide that leads Sara to the right ending.

Ram Dass's character in the nineties film appears to be a lot more magical, as if he is a magician, especially compared to the earlier adaptations. The notion of magic is apparent in every adaptation and in the original novel but it is especially visible in the nineties adaptation. One example is that the Indian servant appears to fulfil the role of a sort of guardian angel for Sara. The first instance that suggests he has magical powers is when he wakes Sara up at night. The doors to her room magically open, starting her awake, and Sara gets up to meet Ram Dass. As the two are standing on the balconies on opposite sides of the street, they bow to each other as the snow falls around them. The cold does not seem to bother Sara as she twirls around and then follows the man's example and bows to him. Another instance that shows Ram Dass's magical powers is when he helps Captain Crewe - who suffers from memory loss – to regain his memories. Sara finds her father and tries to help him remember who she is but Captain Crewe does not remember her until Ram Dass is standing next to him.

As if because of the Indian man's magic, Crewe suddenly remembers everything. Rosemary George mentions that "the Indian servant is a magician, not a domestic worker" (150). Compared to the earlier adaptations, the suggestion that Ram Dass has some form of magical powers is more present in this film.

The fact that the Indian man appears more powerful as there is an implication that he has magical powers, might stem from the overall racial message the nineties film appears to want to convey. Compared to the earlier adaptations, Ram Dass behaves less like a servant in the nineties version. Susan Applebaum mentions that "Unlike the subservience of the servant Ram Dass in the original, which in 1903 reinforced colonial attitudes, the 1995 Ram Dass became a powerful presence throughout the film" (83). Applebaum mentions that the nineties film conveyed themes relevant to late twentieth-century America, such as the representation of non-western cultures and race relations (83). This is visible in the film as Ram Dass behaves more as an advisor to Mister Randolph rather than a servant. Similarly, the implication that the Indian man has supernatural powers makes him appear as more interesting than the 'normal' white humans around him since he apparently has special powers. Ram Dass is represented as a mysterious character. Sara appears drawn to him from the moment that she meets him. The two do not even exchange one word throughout the entire film but they appear connected to each other through India. Their seemingly destined connection symbolizes the message that bonds between humans can cross racial borders. Therefore, the combination of the implied magical powers Ram Dass may possess and the manner in which his relationship to Sara and the other characters is represented illustrates the theme of race relations that was important in the nineties.

The different adaptations of the *A Little Princess* story all shed a different light on gender stereotypes. The representation of the male characters greatly depends on the circumstances in which the films were produced. The nineties film brings in a lot of new

aspects for the characters that usually do not get as much attention. Sara's mother gets a platform to inspire and help other female characters even though she does not appear as a character. Though a definite conclusion is difficult to make seeing as all these adaptations were all made in very different eras and therefore there are bound to be social differences portrayed, it can be seen that concerning the contemporary stereotypical gender aspects of their own time periods all the films convey a message of both female and male empowerment.

Conclusion

In every adaptation, Sara draws strength from her imagination. In the 1917 version, Sara imagines herself in the position of the hero as she rescues her prince. In the 1939 adaptation, Sara imagines herself in the position of a queen who can influence the situations she cannot influence in her reality. Deborah Ross mentions that "progressive or feminist authors […] have encouraged young women readers' belief in fantasy to help them visualize what they want, perhaps as a first step toward going after it" (55). In the 1917 and 1939 version, Sara uses her imagination much as Ross describes. She visualizes what she wants and the audience gets to watch her imaginings with her. In the 1939 version, Sara really wants to help her friends Miss Rose and Geoffrey but she cannot do so in reality. Therefore, she visualizes herself in a position in which she can help them. Similarly, in the 1917 version Sara has no control over her situation and so she imagines herself in a position in which she plays the part of a hero. In only these two films does Sara play the part she wants to act out. Thus, these two films lean more heavily on the concept of Sara's imagination in order to empower her position in the film.

In Chapter One, I mentioned that the eighties series best represents the friendship Sara has with the doll Emily. As mentioned in the chapter, eighties Sara takes the initiative when it comes to Emily. She creates the concept of a doll that can only talk to her and that only she can understand, which creates a small world only she can control, and she uses her

imagination to do so. This series is the only adaptation in which Sara gains strength from her imagination through her creation of Emily but a comparison can be made to the way that nineties Sara uses her imagination to gain control as well. Nineties Sara relies on her imagination as she pretends to curse Lavinia and when she draws a circle on the floor in which she can be safe. Eighties Sara creates a type of relationship which only she can control and nineties Sara shows a similar approach in order to gain control of her emotions. This is the case when she gets angry at Lavinia and when she experiences loss after she hears that her father has died. Though eighties Sara and nineties Sara show their manner of working through their emotions in different manners, they appear to do it for the same reasons.

The films from the nineties and 1917 allow Sara's Indian experience to influence her imagination. The first chapter mentions that nineties Sara's imagination is correlated to her daily life. This is not the case for the 1917 adaptation but this adaptation does include a story that was influenced by Sara's life in India. This creates a bond between the two films as they both show a positive outlook on India. The stories they tell are of a beautiful world in which adventures can be experienced. The world the two Saras create is entirely different from the difficult sober life on the seminary and they both dream they can return to their lives in India. The two films published in 1939 and 1986 do not incorporate such an oriental dream. Seeing as the nineties film is supposed to be based on the 1939 film, this difference as to the Indian influence in Sara's life shows that the creators of the nineties film wanted to show India in a more positive way.

In the nineties film, Sara narrates the *Ramayana*. Though she does not play a part in the story itself, she does control the world in which the *Ramayana* takes place. This makes a contrast to the other two American films in which Sara does play a role herself but she does not tell the story. In a way, the fact that Sara narrates the *Ramayana* could be seen as Sara bringing the Indian tale to the Western world. The nineties film has a tendency to try to

assimilate other cultures into Western society. The Indian Ram Dass is glorified as a magician rather than only a servant. Nineties Sara tells her friends these wonderful Indian tales and she tells these stories whenever she wants. Sara is in control of the stories. Also, the manner in which Sara uses her stories to rebel against the social norms of her society shows how Sara uses her Indian upbringing as a tool to further her purposes.

India is not only shown as the inspiration for Sara's stories but also as the reason for Sara's difficulties to adjust to the western society. In Chapter Two I discussed the fact that Sara finds it difficult to live by all the rules on the seminary and that she is surprised by the struggles others at the seminary seem to experience. Examples of these struggles are Ermengarde's problems with school and Becky's lack of wealth. The nineties film takes the time to show how difficult it is for Sara to fit in, which is different from the other adaptations in which Sara is immediately popular. This stems from the fact that she has lived in India until now. Ariko Kawabata mentions that "through living in colonial India for a long time [Western inhabitants] suffered from cultural ambiguity, dislocation and deracination" (287). The cultural dislocation is what makes it difficult for Sara to adjust to the western society as she has been influenced by another culture. She is deracinated because she has lived in India all her life and therefore she is alienated from the Western culture. This can be seen by the manner in which Sara states that it does not seem normal to be silent during dinner or that she finds it difficult to listen to all those rules. Sara's cultural ambiguity is the reason for her discomfort in Western society since she cannot conform to one culture as two cultures are a part of her. The nineties film shows these problems more so than the earlier adaptations and thus manages to convey the historical social prejudices concerning children living in colonial India in Victorian novels.

In the nineties film, Sara's stories are her own version of a rebellion against the social rules that she is expected to follow. The *Ramayana* starts when Sara is still in India. There,

Sara can speak of her stories all she wants. Similarly, Rama and Sita are happy together in their universe. Prince Rama and Sita part ways after Sara has to leave her home. Rama is numbed by the poisonous gas of the arrows. Sita is locked in a tower. Sara's mind is numbed by the strict rules of the school and she feels as if she is locked in the little world of the seminary. The parallel between the *Ramayana* and Sara's resistance against the social rules of the seminary is emphasized by the manner in which the *Ramayana* disappears from the film when Sara gives up on her stories and thus automatically gives up on the rebellion. This is also when she stops telling her stories to the rest of the girls in the seminary. Sara's stories stopped and thus the *Ramayana* has also fallen silent.

In Chapter Three I explored the notion that there is a difference between the manner in which the nineties Sara and the eighties Sara make friends. This difference stems mainly from the life Sara has had in India. The eighties version relies more heavily on the novel in which Sara did not have much friends but preferred to read rather than play outside. In the nineties film, Sara is shown playing outside with a friend. This already sends out a different message when it comes to Sara's relationship to other children. Still, in the nineties film, Sara begins as an outcast. The rest of the seminary seems to have no interest in nineties Sara's life in India and, though they are gossiping behind her back, they seem to have no regard for her wealth. This is different in the eighties version as Sara quickly gains fans around her. Ermengarde, Becky and even Miss Minchin fawn over Sara in the eighties series. This is not the case in the nineties film. The differences between the two adaptations may exist because the eighties series was made to portray the actual Victorian story while the nineties film was more adjusted to match the principles of the late twentieth century. In the Victorian novel, Sara's elevated status was quite normal and acceptable. It was not strange to have wealthy people and servants. This changed throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, wealthy Sara is treated just like all the other girls in the nineties film while in the eighties series, Sara's status

is elevated above the rest of the girls.

In Chapter Four, the relationships between the characters are discussed from a gender-specific viewpoint. Every adaptation contains a reversal of the gender stereotypes. In the 1917 and 1986 version, Captain Crewe gets unwell after he hears he lost all his money. In the 1939 and 1995 adaptations, Crewe is traumatized on the battlefield and suffers from amnesia. These are representations of a vulnerable status. Also, in the 1917 and 1986 adaptations, Sara's refusal to submit to the life of a maid and her perseverance through adversity is the reason for her eventual return to wealth. Similarly, in the nineties and thirties films, Sara saves herself and her father because she refuses to give up and be caught by the police. These reversals are all discussed in Chapter Four and these topics open up the thought that in a way the manner in which Sara is represented throughout the twentieth century has not actually changed that much. In different manners, Sara gets to keep the position of the female hero of the story.

In the introduction, I mentioned some different perspectives concerning adaptations and adaptation theory. These theories focus on the differences that will occur in different adaptations due to historical and cultural changes. These historical changes must be incorporated into every adaptation as the films necessarily connect to their own contemporary society. The changes this story has gone through throughout the twentieth century reflect this process. The cultural developments affect the presentation of the main character Sara as she appears as an entirely different person in each film but also the other characters such as outsider Ermengarde and the maid Becky. As mentioned in this essay, cultural changes affected the representation of Ram Dass in the later filmic adaptations and in his case these changes affect the plotline of the entire film as he was given a larger part in the nineties film. In a way, this shows that filmic adaptations automatically differ from their predecessors seeing as they must be adjusted to fit in the particular time in which they are published.

The four western adaptations of *A Little Princess* that were discussed in this thesis all

show the original story in a different way. Over the years, Sara's story changed due to artistic liberty and changed social values. The question is whether Sara's story has changed so much that it undermines the position she has in the original novel. Sara's ability to rely on her imagination and draw strength from her own stories has changed somewhat to a reliance on the oriental country she grew up in. This is due to the change that occurred throughout the years concerning the relation to India. The nineties film also differs from the rest of the films when it comes to Sara's resistance against social expectations. In the nineties film, Sara's stories are actively used as a representation of her resistance. Then again, in the nineties film Sara's position in the seminary is lessened as she is only one of the girls and she is not treated any differently from the rest of the girls. As for the gender stereotypes in the films, these have not changed that much throughout the century. In every film there are reversals of gender stereotypes as Sara continues to be the hero of the film as she saves her father or makes sure she saves herself. The different filmic adaptations may incorporate changes to the story-line to adjust the films to the time in which they were published but the most important aspects of Sara's story stay intact and thus it can be concluded that Sara will stay the perfect female hero of every decade in which she is created.

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