



V. Colour and Communication

Worlding in Victorian children's literature: Reading colours in selected texts

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Abstract

This paper attempts to discuss and analyse colour in Victorian children's literature, with a specific axis to addressing systems of inequality and subjugation, including wielding a postcolonial lens. I propose to do that by borrowing a concept from the postcolonial theory laid down by Spivak, the theory of worlding. It refers to how the colonised space is refashioned and remodelled for the native by the coloniser. Although the native is familiar with their birthplace, the refashioning works through processes such as cartography, travelling, and writing. A similar process happens through pedagogy as well, which continues as an invisible form of colonisation. Children's narratives have always been a weapon for worlding, as I try to illustrate through the paper.

Worlding is an appropriate concept to be applied to the genre of children's literature, as the space has been designed and historically used for constructing the child's world. Through inspecting selected narratives of Victorian children's fiction, I look at the role of colour in the process of worlding, and how it manifests as different experiences for the genders.

Keywords: Colour studies, Victorian age, Gender, Race, Imperialism



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“colours are symbols or emblems; that is, they have the power of suggesting to the mind certain ideas, quite apart from anything connected with their physical nature.”
(Audsley)¹

The Victorian age is popularly known as the golden age of children's literature. In terms of the number and sheer volume of publications, and the effort put into the works, the genre became less didactic in its tone and approach. Children's literature started to be more empathetic and began addressing the need for imaginative involvement in children's literature, thus spawning the subgenre of fantasy.

Although it was a prolific age for scientific and geographic expansion, in many respects, it was an age of opposites. Despite suffering having been a major feature of children's literature, which was a protraction of puritanical assumptions of the eighteenth century, nothing had defined children's literature like the Victorian age as far as themes like death and despair were concerned. Many protagonists of the time were either orphaned or denied a loving parent/guardianship. While themes of nationalism and patriotism reflected the ethos of the empire, there were doubts regarding the dearth of values and mechanisation of life, which were seldom hidden in the children's narratives. In fact, many of the problem novels or condition-of-England novels describe the drab working conditions of child labourers and orphans, and how even the children of the rich are deprived of colour in their lives. “The old smoke-stained storehouses on either side rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black even to reflect their lumbering shapes.”² Consequently, a *reverse chromatic nostalgia* was employed in many works, making the child reader yearn for strange geographies and the possible treasures they could offer.

This is where I employ the concept of *worlding*, coined by Gaytari Chakraborty Spivak, to illustrate how colour is effectively utilised to forge and fabricate the worlds of children, particularly in terms of making them cognisant of their agency and positionality within the

¹ Audsley, *Colour Harmony in Dress*. New York, 1922.

² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 1838.

wider context of the empire. Worlding refers to a process whereby the coloniser modifies the world of the colonised through mechanisms like cartography, renaming, and pedagogical instruments such as literature, so that the colonised views their own space through a modified lens. Although *worlding* was initially applied to the coloniser and the colonised, it could definitely be applied in the realm of children's literature, a discipline which is perpetually guarded by preconceived notions and interests of the adult. While critics like Perry Nodelman have compared the status of the child reader to that of the colonised³, this concept has also faced criticism⁴, with some arguing that childhood is a social category one eventually grows out of. However, there can be no doubting the fact that children's literature has consistently been used as a didactic tool, particularly in modifying the reader's perceptions of the external world. I argue that while the use of colour has always been important in literature as a sensory description, it was especially prominent in Victorian children's narratives evoking a chromatic nostalgia for the hinterlands thus fashioning the child imperialist.

The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby by Charles Kingsley is a perfect example of the sombre mood that enveloped many of the children's classics of the Victorian age. Abjection was a common theme in such works, which was characterized by the poverty and squalor of the living conditions of many children, along with societal issues such as child labour. Children were orphaned, either literally or figuratively, where they were raised under the watchful gaze of a governess, while their parents restricted their physical proximity around the children. This is a byproduct of several features either due to absent parents who were occupied in the several parts of the empire or owing to the Victorian belief in separating the innocent child sphere from the adult sexual sphere. The novel opens with these lines from Wordsworth, which sets the tone for the work.

³ Nodelman, *The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature*, 1992.

⁴ Bradford, *The Case of Children's Literature: Colonial or Anti-colonial?*, 2011.

“The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think,
What man has made of man”⁵

The world of the protagonist Tom, who is a chimney sweeper, is full of dull colours of grey and black. His existence is characterised by perpetual hunger, reflecting the lack of colour in his surroundings. Grey and black are colours that are repeatedly employed to describe Tom and his surroundings. Tom desires colour, while simultaneously is repulsed and scared by white. Here, white is an association with the elite who form a separate superior class which explains the anxiety Tom associates with white. “Moreover, the groom looked so very neat and clean, with his drab gaiters, drab breeches, drab jacket, snow-white tie with a smart pin in it, and clean round ruddy face, that Tom was offended and disgusted at his appearance”⁶ White can also be perceived as an absence of colour, a state of emotional nothingness, which could seem unappealing to Tom particularly given his state of want. It could also show his feelings of inferiority since the ability to wear white clothes was associated with privilege⁷.

On the other hand, bright colours are appealing to him, given their emotional suggestions. “I wish I were a keeper,” said Tom, “to live in such a beautiful place, and wear green velveteen, like you.”⁸ When Tom visits a rich household, he realises the stark contrast of the two Englands, between the one which he occupies as “home in a chimney as a mole is underground”⁹, and the palatial and spotless Victorian household, which is an abstraction of the British empire itself. The abstraction of the empire is reflected in the “back staircase from Taj Mahal in Agra”, “cellars copied from the Elephanta caves”, and influences of the Parthenon and Catacombs of Rome¹⁰.

The self-abjection he feels is heightened in such a setting, which makes him acutely aware of his stature. This state of self-abjection is

⁵ Wordsworth, *Poems of William Wordsworth*, 1855.

⁶ Kingsley, *Water Babies*, 12.

⁷ Dyer, *White*, 7.

⁸ Kingsley, *Water Babies*, 14.

⁹ Ibid, 19.

¹⁰ Ibid, 19.

revealed when he sees his reflection in a mirror. "And looking round, he suddenly saw, standing close to him, a little ugly, black, ragged figure, with bleared eyes and grinning white teeth. He turned on it angrily. What did such a little black ape want in that sweet young lady's room? And behold, it was himself, reflected in a great mirror, the like of which Tom had never seen before."¹¹ To portray this self-abjection, the binaries of man/ape and black/white, are used here in the passage. It reflects two of the major anxieties which were prevalent during the Victorian times. The seminal text of Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, had sparked discussions on the centrality of religion and science, which is reflected in many literary productions of the age. Similarly, the anxiety of breaching borders permeated many locations of culture, including food and class.

In *Tom Brown's School Days*, whiteness is not just a symbol of superiority but is also a device to bring in the element of alterity, when Joe, a white boy, is contrasted with the gypsy boy. "Joe's white shirts and spotless drab breeches and boots contrasting with the gypsy's coarse blue shirt and dirty green velveteen breeches and leather gaiters. Joe is evidently turning his nose up at the other, and half insulted at having to break his head."¹² Here, colour is an important visual marker that marks a boundary between the civilised and white Joe, and the uncivilised and coloured gypsy boy. "The border is also between white and red peoples, which in turn specifies the nature of the border... who (coloured) had no concept of boundaries and of the order and civilization that this bespeaks in the white imagination."¹³ The other is perpetually situated in a visual space of alterity for which colour is easily the most essential tool. This is in fact reflective of Goethe's contention of bright colours being the forte of "uncivilised nations and children"¹⁴. "Big black men lounging by the side of the horses... and the women in bright coloured handkerchiefs standing in the sterns steering... His nurse told him that those good-natured-looking women

¹¹ Ibid, 21.

¹² Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, 34.

¹³ Dyer, *White*, 33.

¹⁴ Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, 1810.

were in the constant habit of enticing children into the barges and taking them up to London and selling them..."¹⁵

The body of Victorian children's literature is replete with adventure novels which were particularly meant for the readership of young boys. Ballantyne's *Coral Island* even starts with the dedication "I present my book especially to boys"¹⁶. Several of these adventure novels also contained maps or literary representations of maps, which hints at how these were designed to cater to the imperial agenda of worlding, through which the child readers, specifically male child readers, get their literary exposure to the idea of the empire.

Cartographic representations in Victorian Children's Literature

While maps are graphic expressions of geography, they are not neutral representations. In fact, before the development of critical cartography in the twentieth century, mapmaking was a process in which imagination and national politics had played distinctive roles¹⁷. The role of mapmaking in forging and distributing power has been foregrounded in postcolonial theory since the spatial turn¹⁸. As a visual artefact, maps were included in literary texts as a commodity or material artefact, intended to perform a symbolic function. The child reader, usually a boy, would resonate with the protagonist who is, more often than not, on a dangerous voyage to 'islands inhabited by savages', and view the map as a commodity which simultaneously holds a shared meaning, but also a personal meaning and identity. The microcosm of the map, whose hues of blue, red, and green represented the macrocosm of the empire where the sun never set. In fact, one of the primary designs of nineteenth century children's literature was to shape the child reader into a daring imperialist, as Frank Bullen

¹⁵ Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, 18.

¹⁶ Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, Foreword.

¹⁷ Bushell, "Mapping Victorian Adventure Fiction: Silences, Doublings, and the Ur-Map in *Treasure Island* and *King Solomon's Mines*", 613.

¹⁸ Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World*, 2004.

had offered, "Every British boy is a confirmed imperialist."¹⁹ In fact, a picture of Cecil Rhodes as a child, which has appeared in *Great Work of Time* by John Crowley, portrays him reading a copy of *Boys' Own Paper*, a children's magazine. Adventure novels such as *Through the Darkness: A Conquest of Angola*, and *The Red Man's Revenge* by R.M. Ballantyne were featured in the magazine.

Cartography was a major element of Victorian children's fiction, playing a significant role in the travellers' tales. Exploration driven by curiosity and map-reading even appeared in novels that did not have overt elements of imperialism. One of the major works of the period, *Alice in Wonderland*, can be read as a traveller's account. "This work makes me think about Alice as a traveller in a traveller's tale... She enacts in her own person the usual technologies of fantasy travel, of microscope and telescope..."²⁰ Curiosity is what drives Alice down the rabbit hole, which is punctuated by the adrenaline rush of not knowing what she will find at the other end. In essence, it is a subverted adventure tale where the traveller is a child and, moreover, a girl. There have been multiple critical observations on the unusual choice of a female adventurer, some of them even hinting at the unusual and uncomfortable relationship the author had with young girls²¹. However, I argue that the subversion in the choice of the protagonist is a form of cartographic anxiety, referring to "the objectivist epistemologies of modern cartography, that assume the separation of knower and the world, and how this observer epistemology leads to deep anxiety of how we know and represent the world."²² Replacing the usual observer with a girl may have been a deliberate choice to counteract this cartographic anxiety.

The book begins with the child protagonist, Alice, feeling tired of the monotonous and humdrum affair of life, signified by the lack of pictures and conversations in her sister's book. This monotony and gloom are what makes her spot the rabbit, which is white with pink eyes. The chromatic detail here is important as this contributes to a

¹⁹ Frank Bullen, "Supplement," *Boys of Our Empire*, 3 (6 December 1902)

²⁰ Ait Touati, *Terra Forma*.

²¹ Dionne, *Design Theory, Language and Architectural Space in Lewis Carroll*, 2023.

²² Bille, "Introduction to Cartographic Anxieties", 2017.

sudden break from monotony and her discovery of another world which is much more exciting and offers the possibility of adventure compared to the world she left behind. Geopolitics is quite central to Alice's adventures as she ruminates over latitudes and longitudes, even as she falls down the rabbit hole and spots maps on its walls. She is not even slightly preoccupied or fazed by the fact that she is falling down a rabbit hole; instead, her desire to make sense of the place through geographical calculations is central to the adventure.

The world into which Alice descends is one where the norms and rules of her world are inverted, which could serve as an allegory to a world far removed from England, where customs are not only different but sometimes also breach the prescriptions of civilization. "The roses growing on it were white, but there were three gardeners at it, painting them red."²³ The dream-like quality of the setting is revealed through the colours, which are not natural. Such a device is also used in Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno*, where the protagonist "ran eagerly to the wall and picked a fruit that was shaped something like a banana, but had the colour of a strawberry."²⁴ The escapades of these narratives are marked by surreal adventures revealed through chromatic details. While colours are employed effectively for the purpose of defamiliarization, they also serve as an effective tool in map-reading where the characters embark on exciting adventures to imaginary lands. "Map of fairyland is hung up – is that yellow splotch fairyland?"²⁵ I argue that the trope of adventures to hitherto unexplored lands abounding in unfamiliar sights, defamiliarized through chromatic detailing, is an allegory for imperialism and its associated adventures.

²³ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 80.

²⁴ Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*, 74.

²⁵ *ibid*, 97.

Adventure Novels: A Victorian Tradition

"I could see that he was a white man like myself, and that his features were even pleasing."²⁶

Explorations were central to Victorian children's literature, be it Ballantyne's *Coral Island*, *Ungava: a tale of Esquimaux-land*, or *The Golliwogg's Polar Adventure* by Bertha Upton and Florence Upton. Although the concepts of nations and borders were already existent during the Victorian age, the way they manifested in children's literature holds testimony to the concept of worlding. The easiness of transgressing boundaries was a popular feature in many children's novels including *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. At the heart of this transgression was the anxiety of encountering the other, which is quite often a visceral shock, translated through the garishness and volume of bright colours.

Coral Island recounts the protagonist and his group's adventure to the Coral Islands in South Pacific, home "to the bloodthirsty savages". This book is a perfect example of how colours are used for the purpose of *worlding* and exposes the case of hybridity in the usage of colours. Since the novel is a subjective travel account of their adventures to the Coral Island, there is a wide medley of colours used in a variegated fashion to describe nature which hint at the exoticism of the location.

"the pure, white, dazzling shores, and the verdant palm-trees, which looked bright and beautiful in the sunshine. And often did we three long to be landed on one, imagining that we should certainly find perfect happiness there."²⁷

However, the same colours are employed to describe the savage nature of the inhabitants, and how culturally removed they are, from the White adventurers: "We had seen the quiet solitudes of our paradise suddenly broken in upon by ferocious savages, and the white sands stained with blood."²⁸

²⁶ Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 120.

²⁷ Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 196.

The juxtaposition of white sands with crimson blood is not a mere coincidence but a symbolic revelation of the encounter of the culturally refined White, with the 'savage' population of the island.

"a procession of the natives, many of whom were dancing and gesticulating in the most frantic manner. They had an exceedingly hideous aspect, owing to the black, red, and yellow paints with which their faces and naked bodies were bedaubed."²⁹

The usage of multiple colours indicates a cultural poverty or lack of refinement, when narrated in a children's story. A conflation of bright colours is viewed as a savage trait. It is important to recall the European conception of colours during the nineteenth century for better comprehension. To quote Goethe,

"The active side is here in its highest energy, and it is not to be wondered at that impetuous, robust, uneducated men, should be especially pleased with this colour. Among savage nations the inclination for it has been universally remarked and when children, left to themselves, begin to use tints, they never spare vermilion and minium (sic)"³⁰

Bright colours were expertly used for the purpose of defamiliarization wherein strange topographies were picturised as Edenic constructs of virgin lands, but the inhabitants and their cultural ethos were denigrated and often demonised by the same colour pattern. To illustrate this point, I am quoting two passages from *The Gorilla Hunters*, a nineteenth century adventure novel by R.M. Ballantyne. "It hung in the form of bunches of large grapes, and was of the brightest scarlet colour."³¹ This reveals one of the first encounters the explorers have with the African land, which is exotic and presents endless possibilities, signified by the strange and unknown fruits in vibrant colours. However, when it comes to paying the natives for their services, the author describes how they would rather be paid by

²⁹ Ibid, 311.

³⁰ Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, 282.

³¹ Ballantyne, *The Gorilla Hunters*, 52.

brightly coloured clothes and beads, and similar 'knick-knacks', which signifies their lack of intellectual capacity, which naturally places the explorers as hierarchically superior.

"After mature consideration, we provided ourselves with... tobacco, powder, a few trade-guns, several pieces of brightly coloured cloth, packages of beads – some white enamelled, others of coloured glass – ...and a variety of other knick-knacks."³²

Another strong recurrent theme found in these works is that, although Victorian children's literature has had themes of nationalism and patriotism at the forefront, it also contained enticing representations of unknown lands, which was an imperial project to instil the desire for conquests in young minds. In many narratives set in England, grey and dark are terms that are repeatedly used to describe the external environment, which is a sharp contrast to the bright and colourful parts of the British empire. This might have been a ruse to develop a curiosity and a spirit of exploration in young boys. Be it Alice, who forays to the rabbit hole, or the imperialist travels to the interiors of Africa, the child reader has their world constructed around the British empire which offers many possibilities of adventure.

Crossing the Frontiers: Lessons in Femininity

Crossing the frontiers was not an activity relegated to adventure novels alone. There were novels set in domestic spaces where girl protagonists crossed frontiers to get nurtured and civilised on British soil. This reflects a crucial aspect of geopolitics in children's literature, where gender socialisation is of much importance to the future of the empire.

While young boys had to be socialised to fight for the empire, the responsibility of the young women was to cultivate the domestic sphere. *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett are popular examples that followed this literary tradition. In both the narratives, the children are orphaned, thus continuing a recurring motif in Victorian children's narratives. However, there are differences in how the protagonists view the empire, revealed through

³² Ibid, 131.

careful use of colours. For example, Sara, the protagonist of *The Little Princess* is alarmed by the sheer difference between “the bright and blazing sun” of India and the days of Britain, which are “strange and dark as night.” She finds the beauty standards of Britain to be far removed from what she was used to, which proves to be unsettling. “There are special anxieties surrounding the whiteness of the white women, vis-a-vis their sexuality... women are indispensable means by which the race in every sense is reproduced.”³³

“Colonel Grange’s little girl, Isobel, is beautiful. She has dimples and rose-coloured cheeks, and long hair the colour of gold. I have short black hair and green eyes; besides which, I am a thin child and not fair in the least. I am one of the ugliest children I ever saw.”³⁴ This is an interesting usage of colour, which is mirrored in *The Secret Garden* as well, where the feature of colour is used for systemic differentiation.

We see two kinds of border breaching in *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess*, both recounting the travails of young girls who travel from India to England, since “the climate of India was very bad for children, and as soon as possible they were sent away from it — generally to England and to school.”³⁵ These texts view the process of border breaching as exercises which play an important role in the radical self-fashioning of children. They reconfigure the geopolitics of the British empire, making the border breaching a natural activity; at the same time, an ethnic othering takes place through the employment of colours. As mentioned before, red and yellow are among the few colours that are repeatedly employed to describe the other part of the empire, which is enticing and exotic, but also happens to be the other, only desirable to be conquered.

In *The Secret Garden*, the disagreeable child Mary Lennox is described to have a disagreeable countenance as well. “Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another.”³⁶ The case of a negative prejudice towards the colour yellow is worth examining as it continues

³³ Dyer, *White*, 29.

³⁴ Burnett, *A little Princess*, 8.

³⁵ Ibid, 4.

³⁶ Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, 3.

to have associations with infirmity and poor health. These examples elucidate how colour plays a strong role in cultivating a nostalgia for distant lands and for the purpose of ethnic othering as well. One of the chief themes that recurs in Victorian children's literature, that of orphaned childhood, appears in both of the narratives and the self-fashioning of the girl protagonists happens in England which is relevant to the purpose of worlding.

"Colour too is a colonial subject...colonizing world was divided from the colonized world by the criterion of chromophobia."³⁷

In Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House*, the author makes a deliberate effort to colour the worlds of the child protagonists as well as the child readers with colonial material splendour, be it sugar from West Indies, shawls from India, or fine teacups from China. The sensory amalgamation of the empire is manifested in the lives of the children, who are the miniature purveyors of an empire where the sun never sets, but carefully demarcates themselves from the others through careful usage of sensory materials, including colour.

"...and others were filled with the most beautiful pictures of Britannia carrying the world on her shoulders...Harry thought these paintings finer than any he had ever seen before, and stood for some moments entranced with admiration, on beholding a representation in red, blue, yellow, and black, of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, all doing homage to St. George mounted on a dragon."³⁸

At this juncture, one of the key questions that could be raised is regarding the nature of the empire and what it meant to a Victorian British child. One would see that Victorian children's literature was extremely gendered, according to which the geopolitics and construction of empire varied. In the adventure novels mentioned above, one sees a constant urge to explore and find new places, for which the literary representations of the unknown lands need to be exotic and interesting. While most authors repeatedly use monotones

³⁷ Taussig, *What Color is Sacred?*, 159.

³⁸ Sinclair, *Holiday House*, 179.

of grey and brown to describe English topography, bright tones of red, blue, and yellow are used to describe the east. One can also spot adjectives like 'bright' and 'blazing' accompanying such descriptions. While configuring the empire, Victorian authors make efforts to specify the position of England as the epicentre of the empire while being different from the rest. The collective status of the empire is not similar to a nation but a more complex construct which is rendered in simplistic terms thus:

"Where is home?"

"She doesn't know where home is!" said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn. "It's England, of course."³⁹

The way in which the Victorian British define themselves is through the other. The literary narrative uses the 'bright and blazing' India to describe the 'dark and gloomy' Britain. They use the 'yellow and dark' Indian to describe the 'fair and pink' British. The exercise of self-definition is carried out through rejecting the other, as is observed through the words of Edward Said, "Cultural identities not as essentializations, but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself, and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions: Greeks always require barbarians, and Europeans Africans and Orientals."⁴⁰

The orientalist construction of the East was as different as it could be from the West, which was chiefly described in sensory terms in literature. Apart from the sounds, tastes, and smells, colours form an integral category of sensory experience, through which this difference could be established.

Travelling also evokes feelings of nostalgia for some child protagonists, including Sara in *A Little Princess*. The absence of colours bewilders her, and she is constantly seen to be desirous of colour around her, which might be an unconscious desire to go back to India or a longing for her life in India, attended by numerous Ayahs and servants.

³⁹ Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, 11.

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 64.

“The clouds melting or drifting or waiting softly to be changed pink or crimson or snow-white or purple or pale dove-grey. Sometimes they made islands or great mountains enclosing lakes of deep turquoise-blue, or liquid amber, or chrysoprase-green; sometimes dark headlands jutted into strange, lost seas; sometimes slender strips of wonderful lands joined other wonderful lands together.”⁴¹

Sara's ruminations on seeing the sunset can be read as an allegory to the empire itself. While the shapes of the clouds resemble topographical features to her, the choice of colours cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. The confluence of grey, snow-white, crimson, and amber creates an aura of confluence of multiple cultures. The word chrysoprase-green deserves to be discussed at length, as chrysoprase was a much-favoured substance in Victorian times for making jewellery and artefacts. Queen Victoria herself had favoured chrysoprase ornaments and had many in her collection. Research studies have also revealed that chrysoprase stones and ornaments from China were sold in the 'oriental section' of department stores.⁴² Sara constantly looks for improvements around her space and most of them have to do with more colours. “You see, there could be a thick soft blue Indian rug on the floor... a lamp with a deep rose-coloured shade.”⁴³

Quite similar to how Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* was subjected to a revisionist postcolonial reading later, many works of Victorian children's literature need to be subjected to revisionist reading, to understand the process of worlding in detail.

Later postcolonial readings of *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* have revealed the colonialist gaze in these works, and the case of invisible labour present behind the everyday materialism. Nancy Armstrong has offered, “so basic are the terms male and female to the semiotics of modern life, so that no one can use them without performing the very reifying gesture, whose operation we need to understand, and whose power we want to historicize.”⁴⁴ An interdisciplinary approach

⁴¹ Burnett, *A Little Princess*, 128.

⁴² Cheang, “Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store”

⁴³ Burnett, *The Little Princess*, 104.

⁴⁴ Armstrong, *Some call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity*, 1997.

linking colour studies and children's literature will be effective in understanding the role of colour in Victorian children's literature in forging, as well as perpetuating, the semantics of social constructs like race and gender.

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