

Dawn Sardella-Ayres and Ashley N. Reese

# Sisters, Bosom Chums, and Enemies

## How Secondary Female Characters Subvert the Girls' Bildungsromane

*Abstract: This article explores the functions of secondary girl characters in English-language American and Canadian girls' Bildungsromane. Previously, we have explored girls' literature as a distinct genre, framed in the theory of genre as social action, and our past scholarship examines the ways in which pre-WWII girls' Bildungsroman stories emphasize girls' eventual integration into their communities. Rather than having adventures, as in boys' coming-of-age texts, we have noted ways in which the main girl characters grow "down" into social restrictions, usually as (potential) wives and mothers. Secondary female characters in these girls' stories are compared, contrasted, or conflated with their close peers as they grow to womanhood, whether they function as the protagonists' "bosom friend," a rival or "frenemy," a sibling, or a classmate. However, without the same coming-of-age expectations of a text's or series' heroine, these secondary female characters often demonstrate alternate paths to womanhood, highlighting diversities or serving as a warning to the girl protagonists on their journeys.*

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Nineteenth- and twentieth-century English-language American and Canadian girls' Bildungsromane focus on heroines whose coming-of-age journey almost exclusively involves maturing into socially prescribed roles of a "good" wife and mother. Even if a text or series does not follow its female protagonist all the way to adulthood, she is usually left with little doubt about her expected role in her community, with hints of her future husband and family to come (Tarbox 3). Both within and outside of the texts, especially when explored through a lens of genre theory, these heroines are meant to inspire other girls in their own coming-of-age journeys, representing what it means to be a girl and woman in that place and at that time (Foster and Simons 3–4). Collectively, girls' literature reflects the dangerous liminality girls face on the way to becoming such a "good" woman (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 43). Girlhood is rife with uncertainties, especially for an adolescent or unmarried protagonist post-schoolgirl-age. Often the heroine is expected to be innocent of wanting marriage or children, and innocent of sexual urges; instead, she both depends on and helps to support her family until the right man appears, which ostensibly brings her out of danger (Foster and Simons 8; Sardella-Ayres and Reese 43).

In girls' coming-of-age novels, secondary female characters function in part by contrasting with a text's heroine on her path to womanhood, highlighting the heroine's distinct personality traits and providing guidance, challenges, or prompts to action. While Bildungsroman heroines are often restricted to certain societal expectations and specific roles during their dangerous journeys to white, middle-class, heteronormative womanhood, the secondary girl characters can occupy different social roles and push against boundaries in ways the heroine cannot. These secondary female characters may be part of the heroine's peer group, as sisters, school chums, rivals, girl-crushes, and/or in servant roles.<sup>1</sup> In *The Rise of American Girls' Literature* (2021), Ashley N. Reese argues that the girls' Bildungsroman trajectory underpins girls' orphan, family, and school stories; thus, secondary female characters may be encountered in their new town, as family friends, and at school. In her exploration of Swedish young adult texts from the 1980s, Mia Österlund identifies static models or "matrixes" for girl and boy characters, including some of the "types" of girls (339), such as tomboys, and good and bad girls, which we explore as secondary characters in our working corpus, suggesting that many of these characters resonate despite languages, cultures, and eras. Maria Nikolajeva distinguishes secondary characters as supporting characters, who are "essential to the plot" (112);

satellite characters, who “serve to illuminate some aspects of the plot, or for contrastive characterization” (112); and backdrop characters, who fill in the setting generally without directly affecting the plot or protagonist (113).

We initially structured our girls’ literature research around novels/series most often labeled “girls’ literature” by other scholars (see Foster and Simons; Seelye). We built our working corpus based on the texts’ commonalities, including a child or teenaged female main character depicted in a coming-of-age story arc, an American or Canadian setting with nationalist issues and ideology in the texts, and an American or Canadian author. Using genre as social action (Devitt 578; Miller 69) as a framework, we approach American and Canadian Girls’ Literature in English as a distinct genre. The novels included in this article portray a range of secondary female characters, allowing us to survey the protagonists’ Bildungsroman arcs comparatively. We examine a range of girls’ Bildungsromane to explore ways in which secondary girl characters come of age compared to the heroine, looking at relationships from close chums and relatives to other girls in their community. In this article, the secondary female characters generally align with supporting or satellite characters. For example, the heroines’ best friends, who are notably duller, more practical, and/or less imaginative than the heroine, are often supporting characters. Some who are naughty, mischievous, or devilish might function as satellite characters and a warning to the heroine. Still others, also often satellite characters, give the heroine an opportunity to engage with social justice and/or empathy through charitable acts. These secondary characters in girls’ literature become spaces of resistance to or demonstrate alternatives for what it means to be a woman in their community. Without a heroine’s responsibilities, secondary girl characters may even have more agency and freedom to challenge societal expectations, which sometimes also affords them non-traditional trajectories as women.

## American and Canadian Girls’ Literature in English

When discussing American and Canadian Girls’ Literature in English, we narrow our scope to texts published between 1850 and 1939, beginning with the widely acknowledged first girls’ text, Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and ending with World War II, after which we see the rise of the “teenager” and eventually young adult literature (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 34). These works are

almost always authored by women, and girls are the implied reading audience (Foster and Simons 2). Girls' Bildungsromane can usually also be classified under what Nina Baym identifies as "domestic fiction," "sentimental fiction," and/or "woman's fiction" (23–24).<sup>2</sup> While we are limited by space to explore all the texts that might be considered girls' Bildungsromane, the texts analyzed here (and listed separately in the Works Cited) are the beginning of what might be viewed as a genre.

When examined together through the lens of genre theory, these texts demonstrate a particular "emphasis on female experience and aspirations, and on the construction and analysis of gender roles in a male-dominated society" (Foster and Simons 23) that "deliberately, evocatively, [call] up an experience of transition [in girls' adolescence] and mark that experience as significant" (Pfeiffer 4). With these parameters in place, coming of age begins to mean something different for a female character compared to a male one. The male Bildungsroman centers on adventure, when the hero, at odds with new surroundings, rebels or sets out to find himself (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 8). If his quests are unsuccessful, it is because society has failed him. In the female version, the heroine who is out of step with her new surroundings must, in some ways, learn to conform to them, and to society in general, to survive (Pratt 9).

To define girls' Bildungsromane, we build on Annis Pratt's argument that in the female novel of development, the heroine "is radically alienated by gender-role norms *from the very outset*" and thus the heroine's "initiation [is] less a self-determined progression *towards* maturity than a regression *from* full participation in adult life" (36, emphasis in original). In female Bildungsromane, the primary focus is tension between the domestic/home and outside/away (Pratt 37). Thus, the heroine develops a community of other girls and women tangential to her own growth. Additionally, as Nikolajeva writes, "Marriage as archetypal enclosure is often imminent or hinted at in girls' fiction" (45). Often the girls' Bildungsroman novel or series will end with the heroine newly married, on the brink of marriage, or with the hint of marriage in her future. Girls' literature from this period often follows a particular Bildungsroman arc: one where the heroine "grow[s] down" (Pratt 30), in order to join her community. Not every heroine fully completes this arc, but this trajectory provides a basic framework for the girls' coming-of-age story. Carolyn Miller notes that genres are "open, evolving" and thus, "genres do not constitute a neat, mutually exclusive taxonomy" (57). For this reason, though there may

be nuanced differences between these texts, when viewed through the lens of genre theory, we see them effectively forming one genre together.

In many ways, the heroine's growth involves socialization for the reader, too: as Elaine Showalter observes, a "girls' story" is "designed to bridge the gap between the schoolroom and the drawing room, to *recommend* docility, marriage, and obedience rather than autonomy or adventure" (50, emphasis ours). The heroine is learning to *perform* her gender in a particular way (Butler 45), and by doing so, she ostensibly models that performance for readers. Julie Pfeiffer notes how this kind of text for girls "teaches girls to do gender in an intersectional context" as well (7). Thus, American and Canadian Girls' Literature in English when viewed as a genre participates in what Miller calls a "social action" (56), establishing societal parameters for what it means to be a girl and, eventually, a woman. Here, genre is a cultural product of recurring and reciprocal rhetorical situations, creating meaning through developing conversations with other works (Devitt 576; Miller 69).

The girls' literature heroine is typically white, Christian – usually Protestant – middle- or upper-class, an American or Canadian citizen, cis-gendered, and able-bodied. Secondary characters are generally those who cannot or would not fulfill the Bildungsroman functions required of the heroine. These girl characters do not have to adhere to the same social standards as the heroine, in part because the reader, also assumed to be female, is not expected to want to mirror them and therefore, will not be subject to their influence. To say *all* secondary characters are permitted to defy gendered expectations is an unwarranted generalization, but as we explore below, many of them are given more freedom or agency, whether because of their social status, lack of parents, disability, or simply by virtue of not being the main character. Others achieve comparatively higher social standing and help make the heroine more respectable as a woman, too. Indeed, these secondary characters are not always required to follow the girls' Bildungsromane trajectory, often in purposeful contrast to the heroine.

## Secondary Characters: Sites of Contrast

Sometimes, the girls' Bildungsroman protagonist has a "bosom friend," per Anne Shirley (Montgomery, *Anne* 82), who is as earnestly loyal as the protagonist herself, but who is by comparison more conventional, lacking the sense of daring that the heroine has.

These duller companions both contrast with the protagonist's looks (especially when the white heroine is racially coded as "dark" or foreign to indicate she is a social outlier) and her imagination, as well as serving as moral object lessons for the protagonist's missteps. Mary and Carrie Ingalls or Ida Brown are almost relentlessly good when Laura is naughty or rebellious in Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series (1932–1971). Imaginative Anne Shirley in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Sara Crewe in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), and Rebecca Randall in Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) are contrasted to their duller and almost worshipful best chums, Diana, Ermengarde, and Emma Jane, respectively. Generally, these friends are supporting characters, central to the plot, but occasionally, characters like Ida Brown or Ermengarde, function as satellite characters, providing contrast to the heroine. Most of these already-good girls do not face the heroine's struggles to learn patience, generosity, or kindness, because they possess those qualities (or at the very least, demonstrate them to the heroine). These girl chums, unlike the heroines, do not necessarily require nor reflect growth, but primarily function to model the traditional Bildungsroman path. However, these girls also occupy the same or higher social class as the heroine, demonstrating the socially approved adherence to traditional feminine standards.

### Secondary Characters: Sites of Resistance

Secondary female characters may also function as sites of resistance towards social norms (within reason). This defiance often results from specific social, economic, and/or physical conditions: they are working class, poor, immigrants, and/or disabled, and do not have the option of participating in traditional girls' coming-of-age activities. For this reason, they are often satellite characters, contrasting the heroine without affecting the plot (Nikolajeva 113). Judith Rowbotham emphasizes the middle-class conditions surrounding nineteenth-century fictional girlhood: "A very narrow conception of the role of 'good woman'" is "laid out for girls to follow," and "only by following such a path, ideally ending in marriage, could they hope to become accepted as 'ladies,'" which in turn would "bolster the status of their families" (15–16). The secondary characters who are working class and/or immigrants do not have the same familial or social obligations. Furthermore, class divides – even in the supposedly democratic United States and Canada – usually prevent work-

ing-class secondary characters from social acceptance as “ladies.” With class barriers preventing them from marrying well (with a few noted exceptions), these characters subvert the girls’ Bildungsromane almost by default. Thus, some secondary characters may have no choice but to inhabit more unconventional lives by contrast to the heroines.

Though these poor and/or working-class characters do not have the luxury of learning and adhering to social mores, their behavior is acceptable enough for the heroine to comfortably befriend her. One example is Phebe in Louisa May Alcott’s *Eight Cousins* (1875) and its sequel *Rose in Bloom* (1876). Functioning as a satellite character in the sequel, Phebe works, first as Rose’s maid, and then later as a singer and music tutor. Although, for Rose, “Phebe had long since ceased to be the maid and become the friend” (Alcott, *Rose* 9), Phebe is more aware of the difficulty of leaving her social class. Phebe’s career is framed as proof to Rose’s family that she is not trying to “thrust [her]self into a high place not meant for [her]” when Rose’s cousin, Archie, proposes marriage (Alcott, *Rose* 145). Even so, eventually Phebe relinquishes “all ambitious hopes upon the altar of a woman’s happy love” and marries Archie (Alcott, *Rose* 371). Because of her lower social class, Phebe can pursue her ambitions,<sup>3</sup> but even those are set aside for marriage, completing her own version of the girls’ Bildungsroman.

Another satellite character, Becky from Burnett’s *A Little Princess*, is also part of the working class. Like Phebe, Becky meets the heroine Sara while working as a scullery maid at Miss Minchin’s school, where Sara lives in luxury as a parlour-boarder. Although Sara is later reduced to financial ruin and must work at the school in a nebulous position “as a sort of little superior errand girl and maid of all work” (Burnett 92), their inherent class distinctions are never lost, especially not on Becky. When Sara insists that they “were just the same – only two little girls – just two little girls. [...] There’s no difference now. I’m not a princess anymore,” Becky responds by clutching Sara’s hand, “kneeling beside her and sobbing with love and pain”: “Whats’ever ‘appens to you – whats’ever – you’d be a princess all the same – an’ nothin’ couldn’t make you nothin’ different” (Burnett 89).

At the end of the novel, when Sara is financially restored to the upper class, she brings Becky with her as her maid, keeping their initial social classes intact. Sara returns to the girls’ Bildungsroman path, but Becky never gains access. Sara, not Becky, will spend her young womanhood financially undertaking the social project of feeding London’s starving children, because Sara has the economic and so-

cial means. The class structures are only reinforced by Sara's time in poverty and the sense that she is still a "princess," albeit temporarily bereft of throne, due to her inherently noble character (McGillis 24–25). After all, Sara, not Becky (nor even the girls collectively) inspires the magical attic transformation carried out by their wealthy neighbor, which sets Sara on her path of aristocratic financial restoration.

In Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna Grows Up* (1915), satellite character Sadie Dean follows a different class trajectory than heroine Pollyanna. Before the novel, Sadie was a middle-class minister's daughter, but when Pollyanna meets Sadie, she is working class. Having left home, Sadie barely supports herself financially as a shopgirl. Sadie is on the verge of leaving with a man, whom Sadie describes as "the kind that – notices too much, and hadn't ought to notice – me – at all!" (Porter 65, emphasis in original). Though the text is vague, Sadie's gratitude towards Pollyanna – "I reckon I owe you – more than you know" (Porter 64) – implies that Sadie was considering a sexual relationship with the man. Influenced by Pollyanna, Sadie resists the temptation, but she still bemoans that the only resources available for working-class women are fallen girls' homes. This observation eventually leads to Sadie and Mrs. Carew, Pollyanna's caretaker, creating a home for girls with few economic options beyond prostitution. Sadie becomes Mrs. Carew's secretary, arguably more genteel than a shopgirl, and embarks on a career overseeing this home.

Eventually Sadie marries Mrs. Carew's heir, and although this marriage elevates her to the upper class, it has clear caveats. Whereas Pollyanna's aunt insists that she marry someone with known "people" and "pedigree" (Porter 292), the same standards are not applicable to Sadie. Her fiancé's family is unknown and most likely working class. He also has a disability, which the text contrasts with Pollyanna's fiancé, who is "truly *manly*" (Keith 162, emphasis in original). Even though Sadie marries, ostensibly fulfilling the girls' Bildungsroman path, the text establishes her marriage as lesser than the heroine, Pollyanna's, whose husband has family and wealth and is able-bodied.

Disability changes Bildungsroman possibilities for secondary characters in girls' literature. In Wilder's Little House series, Laura follows the girls' Bildungsroman trajectory, but once Laura's elder sister Mary becomes blind, Mary's own Bildungsroman journey shifts: Laura takes up Mary's childhood plan to teach school, and there is an unspoken assumption that Mary will never marry (and indeed, does not in the book series). Throughout the series, Mary functions as a supporting character, as her actions affect Laura. Much

like Susan Coolidge's Cousin Helen, who is unable to walk in *What Katy Did* (1872), Mary is "denied all prospects of a sexual life" (Keith 84). Instead, Mary attends a school for the blind, where "[w]e learn to do things by ourselves" (Wilder, *Happy Golden* 124). Through her education, Mary gains a measure of independence and adventure, arguably more than any of her sisters: she travels alone on trains, lives away from her family, and learns skills, like beading and playing the organ, which she can monetize.

Once blind, Mary's opportunities differ greatly from Laura's. Laura teaches and lives away from home but is reliant on both Almanzo and Pa to travel. Unlike Mary might have, Laura does not like teaching, nor working as a seamstress, but does so to help pay for Mary's college. Laura's familial sacrifice adds to her "grow[th] down" into domestic femininity, where community and family come first (Pratt 30; see also Gilbert and Gubar 25). Once Laura reaches adolescence, "she is pressured to remain inside" (Romines 26), while even before blindness, Mary "tends to be content to stay within the bounds of the domestic enclosure" (Louw 169), excelling at the household activities that Laura hates. However, once she is blind, while Mary's social role in town is greatly diminished compared to Laura's (or even her younger self), Mary is often portrayed as more active and independent as they grow into young ladies. Mary regularly walks outside with Laura and ponders philosophic and religious matters. She even spends a summer with a friend, and they pull pranks on a store clerk, something a younger Laura might have done, but never a younger Mary. Unlike Laura, who is still expected to participate traditionally in her community – teaching school before settling down to marriage and motherhood – Mary's disability both removes her from the girls' Bildungsroman's traditional expectations and allows her to pursue independent options her sisters cannot.

While secondary characters like Becky and Sadie work, they do so to earn money, not necessarily to pursue a career. However, some secondary characters find professions. As Alcott famously says, Jo March could not remain a "literary spinster" in *Little Women* (1868–1869) due to publishers' and readers' pressure (Showalter 54); Jo, as one of the novel's collective four heroines (Nikolajeva 74), cannot choose a career over marriage. In *Jo's Boys* (1886),<sup>4</sup> once Alcott has more professional agency, her secondary female character, Jo's student Nan, can eschew marriage and motherhood to become a doctor. Jo could not be a literary spinster, but Nan can be a medical one. Meg's daughter, Daisy, marries, fulfilling the girls' Bildungsroman trajectory and following a similar path to her mother. Though both

operate as satellite characters when compared with the boys' Bildungsroman arcs, the orphan Nan does not have the same familial expectations as Daisy. She can pursue her own trajectory because of Daisy's more conventional, heroine-like choice. Nan has potential suitors, yet she *chooses* a career as a doctor instead, in part because of the novel's "disjunction" between "scientific interest and domestic life" (Speicher 79). Nan's singular choice – domesticity *or* career – is not an option afforded to the girls' literature heroine.

Similarly, in Helen Dawes Brown's *Two College Girls* (1886), a secondary character chooses to become a doctor. The text follows the Bildungsroman trajectory of two girls: the heroine Edna and the supporting character Rosamund. While both receive a college education and choose to work afterwards, Edna plans to teach until she repays her financial aid. Then she will marry her fiancé, fulfilling the girls' Bildungsroman arc. In contrast, Rosamund, like Alcott's Nan, plans to become a doctor. Edna's middle-class family has fallen on hard times, while Rosamund's family is upper class. Unlike orphaned Nan, Rosamund expresses an interest in marriage, perhaps in part because of her class and the consequent expectation to "bolster the status of [her] famil[y]" by marrying (Rowbotham 16): "If I ever marry, – and I hope I shall – it may be a shameless confession, but I – hope – I – shall, – it will be the man of all the world that believes most in me" (Brown 294). Rosamund's desire to marry does not supersede her career, a contrast to the Bildungsroman where a heroine grows down to occupy domestic space only.

These secondary characters defy the girls' Bildungsroman while the novel's heroine capitulates. For many of these characters, their resistance is a result of class or disability preventing them from fulfilling social expectations of femininity. However, the characters who resist through bad behavior often do so intentionally.

## Secondary Characters: Sites of Naughtiness

The girls' literature heroines can be described as essentially good, even if they do have outbursts of naughtiness or temper.<sup>5</sup> However, some secondary girl characters are actively naughty or perceived by their community as "bad," and through them, the Bildungsroman heroine experiences the dangers of naughtiness without besmirching her own reputation. The girls often function as satellite characters, primarily contrasting the heroine rather than influencing the plot's outcome. Nellie Olesen's repeated come-uppances in the Little House books highlight to Laura the rewards of patience and not

being covetous, qualities that challenge her. In Burnett's *A Little Princess*, Sara's older classmates at school sneer and cause mischief, reinforcing Sara's personal commitments to behave with kindness and generosity. Kitty Walton – one of the Little Colonel's school friends in Annie Fellows Johnston's *The Little Colonel's Christmas Vacation* (1906) – enacts the high-spirited pranks that would be inappropriate for the noble Lloyd Sherman to perform herself.<sup>6</sup> Anne Shirley's social group includes Ruby Gillis, whose boy-craziness (and eventual death) prove didactic examples for Anne to focus on her studies instead of romance in Montgomery's *Anne of the Island* (1915). In Montgomery's *Emily Climbs* (1925), Emily Starr's rival at Queen's Academy is also a budding writer. Emily's jealousy provides opportunities for her to hone skills necessary for a writer, and her sharp observations will become one of Emily's strengths in her published works.

The Emily books also conclude with what might be interpreted as a more progressive view of womanhood via Emily's best friend, Ilse Burnley, who functions as a supporting character. Throughout the series, the community compares Emily and Ilse, with Ilse involved in the kinds of audacious scrapes that Emily, with her respected family connections, must reject. Ilse even paves the way for some of Emily's more unconventional actions, including a scandal in which they shelter all night with two boys at an abandoned house. However, Emily's reputation does not suffer nearly as much as Ilse's, since Ilse's behavior is usually far worse by comparison, and Emily is part of the esteemed Murray family. Both Emily and Ilse become engaged and break their engagements, but while Emily is passively left by her fiancé, Ilse takes her future into very active hands. Ilse leaves her fiancé at the altar, rushing away in her wedding dress to her true love. Ilse's generally unconventional behavior facilitates Emily's own choice to prioritize a career over romance. Both young women eventually choose husbands who will allow them to prioritize their careers: Emily as a writer and Ilse as an elocutionist.

Sometimes the secondary female characters illustrate the dangers of what happens when a girl fails to grow up to be a good woman. In Johnston's Little Colonel books (1895–1912), supporting character Ida Shane is not merely “naughty,” she is an example of what can go wrong if a girl lacks good role models and/or dabbles with romance too young. Johnston's series' cornerstone ideology celebrates a slow journey through girlhood, with joyful experiences discovered every step of the way, but with romantic entanglements best left well into the future.

Girl-crushes – usually a younger girl’s admiration of and attachment to a girl a few years older in her school or community – are one way that girls’ literature heroines delay romantic/sexual attachments with boys or men and becomes a way to identify queerness in what initially reads as relentless heteronormativity.<sup>7</sup> However, girl-crushes can also be a threat if the object of admiration is not a model girl. Thirteen-year-old Lloyd Sherman’s fascination with her older, glamorous schoolmate not only causes problems but endangers Lloyd’s reputation in Johnston’s *The Little Colonel at Boarding School* (1903). Fifteen-year-old Ida is sophisticated, flirtatious, and secretly engaged to a forbidden lover. She thus brings Lloyd into proximity to inappropriate elements, especially when it is revealed that Ida’s romantic suitor, “Edwardo,” is Ned Bannon, a spendthrift with a bad reputation and a penchant for drink and gambling. Ida’s thwarted elopement with Ned is the scandal of both school and town, and Lloyd’s reputation is almost ruined by her inadvertent association with Ida’s actions. Later, in *The Little Colonel’s Knight Comes Riding* (1907), eighteen-year-old Lloyd discovers that Ida is gravely ill and living in poverty with her now-husband Ned, a drunkard, and their four-year-old son. The experience opens Lloyd’s eyes to her own unsuitable beau, reminding her of the risks of marrying the wrong man and having children with him.

In Martha Finley’s Elsie Dinsmore series (1867–1905), the near-perfect Elsie is often tried by the “spoiled” and “wilful” Enna (Finley, *Elsie* 8). Although technically Elsie’s aunt, satellite character Enna is younger than Elsie, and they are often compared. Because Elsie’s mother is dead and her father is away, Elsie is treated as an outsider, while Enna is the “pet and plaything” of the household (Finley, *Elsie* 8). Enna treats Elsie with hostility, and asks for and receives Elsie’s belongings, regardless of Elsie’s protests. Elsie remains kind despite Enna’s adversity, as Elsie’s Christian principals are those of her dead, idealized mother.

As the series progresses, Elsie’s good behavior is rewarded. She marries a good and wealthy husband and has exemplary children. Though Elsie faces hardships, she has the support of her friends and family. However, as Elsie’s foil, Enna continues an “indulgence of a fretful, peevish temper” (Finley, *Womanhood* 9), and as a result, her adulthood is filled with adversity, including two marriages that end tragically, financial loss, and an accident which leaves her with “an impaired intellect” (Finley, *Children* 146). Enna’s situation becomes a charitable opportunity for Elsie – giving Enna money and housing, nursing her, and even raising her children – although Enna is “hate-

ful" to Elsie (Finley, *Children* 142). Enna lacks agency: her accident erases her memory, leaving her with a happy, "childish" temperament (Finley, *Children* 146). In this way, Enna functions as a didactic cautionary tale of what happens when girls are indulged.

These naughty, unredeemed secondary characters must live with the consequences of their actions, which serve as warnings to the heroine (and presumably the readers). The satellite characters, in particular, contribute to the protagonist's characterization (Nikolajeva 113). Unlike the heroine who learns from her consequences, some supporting characters may develop (like Ilse), but they will never achieve celebrated domestic womanhood as the heroine. Even the heroine who is inept at housekeeping or cannot hold her tongue becomes a woman who exemplifies traditional women's spheres with little exception, until Mary Ware in Johnston's *Little Colonel* books demonstrates new possibilities.

### Sites of Progression: Mary Ware

Nikolajeva explains that defining a protagonist involves analyzing "who in the story undergoes a change," even if that change is "almost negligible" (64). Elsewhere we have discussed ways in which the Bildungsroman heroine changes to occupy her social place (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 43). However, in the *Little Colonel* books, the supporting character, eponymous *Mary Ware: The Little Colonel's Chum* (1908), not the original protagonist, Lloyd Sherman, is the one who grows and changes in accordance with a Bildungsroman arc. Lloyd does not *learn* her role in society but instead claims her dead grandmother's place, which she has occupied since age five. Lloyd, the embodied model of American femininity and Old South aristocracy throughout the series, remains in this state of static, iconic personification even after she marries. However, Mary, who has idolized Lloyd since childhood, goes through the series' real coming-of-age trajectory with agency. As a girl growing up in small Arizona and Texas outposts, Mary lacks the social and familial power Lloyd possesses. But because of her class and place Mary can be more active, even a career girl: a new kind of American heroine who is able to shift productively back and forth over social boundaries and occupy multiple, even nontraditional, roles. Mary represents Johnston's hybrid old-and-new dynamic but emphasizes the new and modern.

A hybrid girl like Mary can be what Lloyd cannot. Lloyd becomes a beloved, if anachronistic, model of Southern manners and gentility. A girl of Lloyd's social class – a debutante and a young society

wife – might carry out benevolent acts of domestic charity in Lloydsboro. It is unfathomable for Lloyd the gracious Southern woman, even with her famous temper, to furiously confront the wealthy men in her community, even on behalf of poor, sick children. However, Mary can, with her “Wild West” background and reputation for being forthright rather than wholly aristocratic. Furthermore, Mary’s Bildungsroman trajectory is not always about conforming to ideal femininity and social roles, and she often demonstrates agency lacking in the girls and women around her. Mary has hereditary ties to Lloydsboro and can access the role of genteel lady; unlike Lloyd, however, Mary can also tackle urban housing reform, take a paying job, speak at political meetings, write letters and editorials, and even challenge wealthy landlords in ways that would be unacceptable for a young woman of Lloyd’s class and social station. Most importantly, Mary also does something that neither Lloyd nor any other girl in the series do: she questions and confronts the patriarchal, capitalist system that has caused the need for housing reform in the first place. She subverts sacrificial models of womanhood by using her ascribed role to her advantage and the advantage of others. Mary can have a career and social/political power, as well as marriage to the man she loves. She has more possibilities than Lloyd, even supplanting Lloyd as heroine because she is active, not static. Mary becomes a more dynamic, progressive, active woman in part because she is *not* tied to personifying an ideological idea about place and history in the same way that Lloyd is. It might be argued that Johnston accidentally presents a more progressive view of womanhood with Mary’s ascent from her secondary role as “The Little Colonel’s Chum” into the series’ true Bildungsroman heroine.

## Conclusion

In many ways, these secondary characters, both supporting and satellite, facilitate the heroine’s growth into socially acceptable womanhood, in preparation for what the texts purport are the ideal roles of wife and mother. However, their contrasting functions with the girls’ Bildungsroman protagonists demonstrate other possible roles for girls and women at the time, raising questions about gender boundaries and performativity as well as social responsibilities. By recontextualizing how we look back on the history of American and Canadian Girls’ Literature in English, we can further interrogate ways girls and women construct and resist their roles in relation to their social, historical, and cultural environments.

The girls' literature heroine is hemmed in by societal expectations for women: "many girls' books preserve a socially conservative view of acceptable feminine behavior, as they had to meet the approval of the generally male-run publishing houses, as well as that of the social gatekeepers" (Reese 9). For this reason, while a heroine is generally bound by the girls' Bildungsroman arc where she grows down into domestic roles, secondary characters can become active sites of subversion, even agency.

*Biographical information: Ashley N. Reese, PhD, is a Learning and Development Coordinator with the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) at the University of South Florida, US. Her recent book is The Rise of American Girls' Literature (2021). Her research focuses on the turn-of-the-century American and Canadian Girls' Literature in English.*

*Dawn Sardella-Ayres, PhD, has published on Alcott, Montgomery, Johnston, and Wilder, and researches issues related to gender and race performativity, as well as the Künstlerroman, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth century girls' texts. She is the L.M. Montgomery Institute's 2023 Research Associate.*

## Notes

1 Secondary female characters may also be mothers/mother figures, grandmother/grandmother figures, maiden aunts, or younger, weaker, and/or sickly girls who need protection. They provide different functions than the peer-age characters discussed here.

2 In fantasy novels, secondary female characters may be witches, god-mothers, stepmothers, magical beings, and even animal sidekicks. The fantasy girls' Bildungsromane requires a different methodology (Pratt 36).

3 Notably, working-class Phebe can pursue a music career, but middle-class Meg March cannot be an actress.

4 *Jo's Boys* follows Jo's male and female students after graduation. Because the novel is in the Little Women series and its ongoing portrayal of Jo March and her sisters' adult lives, we situate it as part of girls' literature.

5 The heroines who engage in naughty behavior are often punished. For example, Katy's disobedience in *What Katy Did* leaves her bedridden temporarily, during which time she becomes a mothering figure (Reese 60).

6 Notably, where the heroine's peer group are all generally the same class and race, the "naughtiness," like Sara Crewe's classmates Jessie and Lavinia

or Lloyd Sherman's friend Kitty Walton, displays a circular logic that more privileged girls can behave in ways that poor, immigrant, and/or non-white girls cannot.

7 There is not enough space here for a detailed discussion of the girl-crush. In pre-Freud girls' stories, women's same-sex crushes were socially accepted, in fiction and real life, especially in "the classically gynocentric setting of the girls' school" (Inness 46).

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