

“A Garden of Her Own: The Role of Self-Centeredness in *The Secret Garden*”

Over the course of *The Secret Garden* (1911) Mary Lennox changes from a spoiled, self-centered child to one who has empathy and compassion with interest in plants, animals, and people. Many critics argue that it's the garden that transforms Mary and allows her to transform her community, but in order to access this private healing space, I argue that she must first use her selfish tendencies to claim the secret garden as her own. In this paper, I show that Mary must rely on what appears to be her strongest flaw— her self-centeredness, in order to improve. Focusing on her statement to Dickon, “I've stolen a garden” (121), I argue that it is this act of theft, not her lack of contrariness, that moves the novel to happy conclusion. While the point of the novel appears to be for Mary to heal and grow and become other-centered, I argue that it is being self-centered (stealing the garden) that helps Mary, while being other-centered (saving Colin) causes her to lose the sanctuary of her secret garden and her power.

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