

ABSTRACT

THE SUBVERSIVE NATURE OF THE MATERNAL IN VICTORIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

During the nineteenth century, middle class women in industrialized England found their roles in the private sphere devalued. Because of capitalism, society placed a higher value on the work done by wage earners than the work done without pay in the home. As a result, bearing and raising children was thought to be of little worth because it held little economic value. Though many Victorian writers resisted this patriarchal thinking, this resistance is especially clear in many narratives written for or about children. Three Victorian writers of children's literature deal with the devaluation of the mothering role in their stories. These authors, Frances Hodgson Burnett, George Eliot, and George MacDonald, question their culture's devaluation of the mothering role. From their narratives, it becomes clear that mothering is of equal, if not greater, importance to human relations and society than any product or wage the capitalist society may produce.

Deborah Druley
May 2004