The much-loved tale read by generations of children, now annotated and with over one hundred stunning illustrations. Frances Hodgson Burnett was famous in her time for her adult novels and her forays into children's literature with Little Lord Fauntleroy and A Little Princess. The Secret Garden, her story of an orphan girl who moves from India to the British countryside, has become a favorite book of every generation thereafter. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, the author of the definitive biography of Burnett, brings out aspects of Burnett's life that led her to write the book, details of the Victorian England time period, attitudes toward children, and Burnett's spiritual leanings. Gerzina captures the magical nature of the tale and the coming together of three children through restoring a hidden garden. With over one hundred illustrations, many in vibrant color, The Annotated Secret Garden is an enchanting gift for any child or for any adult who is still a feisty child underneath.

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My Personal Review:
The name Frances Hodgson Burnett now conjures images of fusty Victorian morality stories. The Annotated Secret Garden analyzes her most well known work and reveals Burnett to have been a far more complicated writer who, while she did intend to impart a moral message, followed a theology more heterodox and diffuse than her reputation suggests.

Mary Lennox is a neglected child who is sent back to England after a cholera epidemic in India kills her parents. She is given a home at Misselthwaite Manor by her uncle, who is a self-absorbed hypochondriac.
Her only friends are a servant girl and a small bird, who helps her find a secret garden in the grounds of the manor. Eventually, Mary becomes healthier, both physically and mentally, and through her efforts to revive the secret garden she finds renewal not just for herself but for her cousin Colin and her uncle as well. Burnett's theological beliefs, a mixture of Christianity, and "New Thought" or what we now call Positive Thinking, are well developed and used to good effect throughout the story.

The real pleasure of annotated volumes like this are the many notes which explain and expand on what has become confusing or obscure over time. This volume is also a pleasure because of the many fine illustrations, both in color and black and white, drawn from the many different editions. The Annotated Secret Garden will appeal to children being introduced to it for the first time and to adults who, while familiar with the story, may not be so aware of the background and beliefs of its author.

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