In A Different Place: Feminist Aesthetics and the Picture Book

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"The project of childhood is to make a world in which to find a place to discover a self."

—Edith Cobb
The Ecology of the Imagination in Childhood

Picture a country garden, pasture, or perhaps a village scene, peopled with young children, childishly playing grown-up in a shapely landscape. The children bear the innocent polish of a sheltered interior, even outdoors, of a delimited infinite space, of calmed skies and flowering nature. Their whimsical expressions belie the stylized clothing in which they are dressed. The children stand serene in such a place, along with readers, struck by the romantic associations of such delicate environs, of tidy young life amid domestically-cultured green spaces.

How sweet, we think, as we survey the pictorial landscape, or, how sentimental, or, how romantic: an idyllic depiction of nostalgic early worlds. Does this interpretation, this quick reading, deny other possible visions? Do we tend to border children's texts and pictures into a simplified world, where we can exercise control over its readers, accessibility over its texts, and exclusion of any larger cultural meanings?

The illustrations described above could be by any number of modern illustrators of the pastoral in children's books, where each page sings of the romantic rhythms of a dreamy, often old-fashioned, childhood. Consider the work of Maurice Boutet de Monvel, Henriette Willebeek Le Mair, E. Boyd

Smith, Carl Larsson, Elsa Beskow, Jessie Willcox Smith, Rachel Field, Tasha Tudor, Jane Dyer, Satomi Ichilawa, among others, who demonstrate what could be called a feminine tradition in picture book art. Feminine (and masculine) in this essay are conceived as cultural constructs rather than biological givens. Note that gender or nationality of artist is not the determinant of such association, but, rather, the romanticized depiction of childhood.

My interest is in exploring the idea of a feminist aesthetics of the picture book: first, by surveying the scope of feminist criticism that impacts on children's literature and Romanticism; and, second, by applying these theoretical insights to the picture book world of Kate Greenaway, an exemplar of romanticized children's books, whose pastoral imagery persists in shaping the modern picture book landscape and aesthetic. While this prettified world might look sentimental, archaic, or even repressive; what is needed is a *re-vision* of such reverie, whereby the sense of place is seen with different eyes. Even the simplest text or image can be made more complex when we know the context, when we conjoin familial and feminist values to familiar readings. Feminist criticism has the potential to challenge our every assumption about literature and reading, about gender and genre. It has stimulated my own search to help construct a feminine tradition in children's literature, one in which women's unique ways of knowing are *known* in the literature of childhood.

I plan to glimpse into this ambitious re-vision by small steps, by working from theory to practice, by exploring the following subjects affecting children's books:

1. the larger issue of feminist criticism;
2. the place of children's literature within its concerns;
3. the tradition of gendered Romanticism in literature;
4. the work of Kate Greenaway as feminine Romanticism;
5. the nature of feminine aesthetics in picture book art.

These are the concerns that interest me and lead me back to the Victorian paradisiacal picture book world, while looking toward critical revolutions of thought that make even the viewing of pretty pictures more problematic.

It is essential that adults concerned with children and their literature re-vision the work of the women who created these romantized worlds of childhood. We need to understand, and help young people appreciate, the alternative worlds of female artists, both historically and in our own time. Young children, both male and female, need and deserve the encouragement to be open and receptive to these alternative ways of knowing.

FEMINIST CRITICISM

My exploration of picture book aesthetics is a small part of a larger intellectual inquiry that is changing the way we think, the way we read, the way we know. These revolutionary changes, enormous in their influence and pervasiveness, are described as a paradigm shift, drawing on the work of Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn, in his well-known, widely-applied work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, describes the impact of questioning basic assumptions governing the ways we know, the gathering and interpreting of knowledge. Examining the influence of feminism on academia, Carol Christ finds a requisite paradigm shift: "a questioning of fundamental and unquestioned assumptions about canon, ideas, authority, and method that operate in the academy and in the disciplines" (53). In all academic areas, encompassing the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences, scholars are beginning to question the assumptions upon which knowledge has been organized; fields, periods, and problems defined; and how, by whom, and for whom information has been gathered and disseminated. Disciplinary boundaries are being blurred as fields cross-fertilize and form new branches of learning. The notion of cultural values and concepts, even "Truth" itself, is no longer seen as absolute, but more a product of a given time and culture.

In no academic field has this profound change been more visible than in literary studies. Since the 1960s, feminist critics have pioneered the process of examining the way we read, write, and discuss literature. It was long assumed that the typical author, reader, and critic was a generic male, whose thoughts recorded the important facts and fictions of the culture. Sandra Gilbert relates the beginnings of awaken-

ing as a kind of conversion experience, "as people who must bear witness, people who must enact and express in their own lives and words the revisionary sense of transformation that seems inevitably to attend the apparently simple discovery that the experiences of women in and with literature are different from those of men" (850). Feminist criticism opens up new ways of looking at literature: How are females portrayed? What assumptions are being made about gender, and to what effect on the reader? What characterizes women's writing? What are their stories, their experience of a time and culture? What and who makes up the canon—the hierarchy of valued literary works—and where does women's writing fit? No one philosophical or political stance exists among feminist critics, but, rather, one major thread: *the opening and reshaping of the literary canon*—a literary as well as political goal.

Feminist criticism plays a leading role in questioning traditional assumptions about literature—embedded images, roles, and responses that have been a piece of the whole cloth of patriarchal values. Feminist critics not only challenge the interpretation of classic texts (who decides what and why), but counter the traditional assumptions of the categorization of historical periods along with accompanying authors, the pronounced focus on male authors to the exclusion of women writers, and the privileging of certain types of literature over others. The traditional ways of assigning value to literary works are no longer considered absolute. Nontraditional formats (letters, diaries, treatises, children's literature, for example), popular culture literature, and obscure women's works surfaced as worth re-examining. Jane Tompkins, Janice Radway, Cathy Davidson, and Nancy Armstrong are four of the many scholars who have pioneered in revisionist studies of popular and domestic culture: its readers and reception of texts. Their critical concerns have wide-ranging implications for the whole body of literature. Tompkins's *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* introduces the notion of "cultural work"—a different way to see the influence of popular literary works on a culture and proposes a redefinition of literature "not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to refine the social order" (xi). Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular*

Literature presents a more problematic perspective toward romance fiction, in which the female readers of romance novels both affirm and subvert patriarchal values through their reading. Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and The Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* examines literature within "a complex social, political, and material process of cultural production," with emphasis on the role of writers, printers, and, of most importance, real readers. Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* traces the development of gendered literature, with masculine objects associated with economic and political qualities, and feminine objects embedded with emotional qualities. This theoretical work in literary studies is changing the way we understand genre and gender in literature, with implications for research into children's literature.

Modern feminist scholarship in psychology has offered insight into these generic and genderic questions and challenges. In the field of educational psychology, new epistemological models of human growth and development have emerged, which are attuned to the distinctions of cultural gender. In a hybrid of disciplines, these psychological insights have been incorporated into literary criticism. Carol Gilligan's landmark book, *In A Different Voice* (1982), argues that the stately models of human growth constructed in developmental charts and theorems ignore certain truths about life, about differences. viewing the male model—whether of morality, of heroic quests, or of Romantic poetry—as the single mode of human experience denies the differences that gender brings. Not only denied but dismissed. The result is that female perspectives are marginalized, and this diminution pairs the child and the woman in a similar status. Gilligan describes a divergent conception of self and morality that is characterized by theme, not gender, although often sex-related in our culture. The male model is based on separation, on the ability to distance oneself in order to determine objective truths and a hierarchy of values. Men usually hold a "justice perspective" on morality: choices are made by applying abstract, universal rules about human rights to individual cases. The female model is rooted in connections among people in contextual situations, in a grounding in networks of relationships. Women usually hold a "perspective of care and responsibility," marked by response and

resolution. Gilligan points out that these perspectives are not opposites or sequential, but are complementary: subjectivity and objectivity.

Female differences have until recently been slighted or perceived as inadequate or undeveloped. Most psychological theory was based on the observation of men and ignored the way women differed. What a difference it makes if the feminine perspective is acknowledged and valued, if the different voice is heard. New metaphors are possible for perceiving ourselves in relation to one another and to our environment. Gilligan calls for a psychology of love and morality that encompasses both knowledge and feelings, for "a language that conveys a different way of imagining the self in relation to others" (91). Gilligan's feminist psychoanalytic theories are part of a larger movement in psychology, known as "the Self-in-Relation School," which emphasizes interpersonal relationships rather than anatomy in a construction of femininity as an alternative to masculinity. Nancy Chodorow views gender identity as shaped by the shifting union and separation from the mother. While boys define their identity by difference and separation, not relation, to the mother, girls continue to define themselves relationally. She summarizes this difference in these words: "The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world; the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (43–44). Feminine personality, in any given society, tends to define itself in relation and connection to other people more so than the male personality (44). Women identify with their daughters, who are not forced to separate from the mother, unlike sons, who are encouraged to develop an identity separate and opposite. The male child will tend to repress the feminine within himself and devalue the feminine in the outside world. Jean Baker Miller suggests that "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships" (83). Traditionally, only the male model of separation and autonomy has been credited as the heroic ideal, but now the female model of interrelationship has revealed a different experience of life.

What are "women's ways of knowing"? A book, by that title, by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, explores the development of a feminine self, voice, and mind. Based on in-

depth interviews with 135 women, the authors present five major epistemological categories in women's frames of mind: *silence*, in which women are voiceless; *received knowledge*, in which women receive knowledge but do not construct it themselves; *subjective knowledge*, in which intuition creates new connections; *procedural knowledge*, in which reason predominates; and *constructed knowledge*, in which private and subjective truth is sought. Constructed knowledge integrates the various relational ways of thinking within a context, an appreciation of complexity, a sense of interdependence. The basis is the conviction that "all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known" (137). Such a revelation changes the way knowledge is viewed and the importance placed on frame of reference. The authors draw on the work of Sara Ruddick, who chronicles the transformation of her thinking from separate and procedural to connected and caring, a sense of empathy that Ruddick calls "maternal thinking" (142–43). The image of mothering suggests the intimacy in the relationship between the knower and the known. Maternal metaphors are often at play in feminist criticism. Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests that in modern women's novels often the heroine is "the author's daughter." Mitzi Myers applies that insight to children's literature and speculates that the whole of a story for children could be viewed as "a narrative space encoding a wish for remothering" (113).

These groundbreaking ideas have sparked debate in many disciplines over traditions in language and literature. Feminist critics have applied the concept of *difference* to challenge canonical views of gender and genre, to recast literary lives and periods in alternative ways. Elaine Showalter's term "gynocriticism" refers to the new in seeing how women both write and read differently from men (128). These differences would be revealed in biographical experiences of writers and readers as well as in the culture of discourse, the literary landscape in which literature is conceived and consumed. Feminist literary criticism calls us to look again—to experience, in Adrienne Rich's words, "a re-vision" (57). This reexamination is taking place in a multitude of fields, including literary studies, librarianship, art history, religious studies, anthropology, history, learning theory, and pedagogy. These are a few fields whose scholarship affects what we do with

children and young people. Feminist criticism is calling for a re-vision of our most basic assumptions about both literature and reading. Kay Vandergrift challenges us to see how our views on children's literature might change if we applied a more feminist perspective (22). In an article in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Vandergrift argues for a feminist perspective for research and suggests new directions and insights which might follow. She connects feminist criticism with many of the traditional approaches to reading texts and making meaning, including formalism, archetypal criticism, genre studies, and reader-response. Her attention is directed to the literature of childhood and the impact of gender on the growing reader—and on the larger world. Vandergrift says, "Ultimately a feminist reader-response theory that empowers all readers represents a sociopolitical act that challenges hierarchical power structures and authorized meanings" (25). In the same issue of *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Jane Anne Hannigan and Hilary Crew call for a new paradigm for librarianship that builds on its frame as a feminized profession (28). They apply recent feminist scholarship to the field of librarianship, urging "a re-examination of women's work and ways of knowing" (31). Drawing insights from the work of Carol Gilligan, Sara Ruddick, Mary Field Belenky and coauthors, and Sandra Harding, Hannigan and Crew propose the development of a feminist epistemology in the field of librarianship that would open up alternative ways of thinking that emerge from the realities of women's lives. A feminist model of scholarship would be characterized by multiple ways of knowing, alternative perspectives, and bottom-up research, in which the research begins with the subject's unique perspective, in which the research is *for*—rather than *on*—the subject being studied. Rather than upholding autonomy, independence, and abstraction over interdependence, intimacy, nurturance, and contextualism, women's connected knowing is culturally grown, like the child itself.

FEMINISM AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

How has feminist criticism, in all of its richness of insight and application, affected the field of children's literature? All of these concerns related to women and the canon, to women's ways of knowing, have surfaced to some extent in

the understanding of the female tradition in children's literature. The ways of knowing are slowly unfolding. As Kay Vandergrift writes, there is a felt need for "a feminist research agenda in youth literature," for further research with a gendered perspective on language and the literary canon. As Mitzi Myers observes, in this age of deconstruction, children's literature folks are more interested in constructing a canon, in elevating one strand at the expense of another (111). As Myers notes, "The critical discourse of children's (like most critical discourse) is a site of struggle. . . ." (111). Into the arena are the innocent-eyed books of childhood, where gendered constructs stride across the page.

Gender interests in children's literature have long been a staple of cultural discourse. Even more than a century ago, children's book critics and educators debated in the Victorian periodical press over what constituted girls' or boys' books. Lance Salway's *A Peculiar Gift* is an anthology of writings collected from nineteenth-century periodicals, with numerous excerpts exploring gender differences in reading, such as Edward Salmon's essay on "Books for Boys" (371). I am researching a manuscript collection of contributions sent to the popular children's magazine, *The Youth's Companion*, in the 1880s, all of which are clearly marked on an outside envelope with an editor's designation as a "boys" or "girls" story. As Elizabeth Segel points out in her essay on historical gender issues in children's literature, gender indeed influences the experience of childhood readers in terms of what is made available or considered appropriate (165). While girls traditionally read across the boundaries of gender, devouring their brothers' books as well as their own, boys have been limited by the gender division. Speculating on this condition, Segel writes:

> In a society where many men and women are alienated from members of the other sex, one wonders whether males might be more comfortable with an understanding of women's needs and perspectives if they had imaginatively shared female experience through books, beginning in childhood. At the least, we must deplore the fact that many boys are missing out on one of fiction's greatest gifts, the chance to experience life from a perspective other than the one we were born to—in this case, from the female vantage point (183).

Feminist criticism dwells on that female vantage point. Critics, scholars, teachers, and librarians seek to provide "imaginatively shared female experience through books," by uncovering the gendered constructs of the past, by making the female experience in literature more accessible to both girls and boys,by closer understanding the gender experience of readers, and by placing the genre within a larger context of women's writing. There is growing recognition of the alliance between children's literature and women's writing. Women as teachers, writers, and mothers have been the primary transmitters of cultural values. Historically, children's literatures reflects women's concerns in storytelling, fairy tales, sharing books, and in the general nurture and education of children. Women and children have been relegated to the same domestic sphere. Both the child and the woman can be viewed as "the Other"—excluded from the realms of generic male representation in literature and its readership. As Lissa Paul states, "Women and children have been invisible and voiceless for so long" (187). Perry Nodelman, one of the strongest critical voices in the field, addresses the nature of children's literature as an activity of women. Most authors, editors, critics, and scholars of children's books are women. Most children's teachers and librarians are women. It is women who historically have assumed the responsibility for the care and education of the young. Most readers of children's literature are female. Nodelman notes that even children's books written by males have more in common with other children's books than with other kinds of writing by men (32). Lissa Paul argues for appropriating feminist theory to children's literature: "Both women's literature and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities" (187). Because of this linkage, children's stories often share characteristics with women's stories: being close to home; often trapped in enclosed spaces; writing in nontraditional formats, such as journals, poems, romance novels; and lacking the money or employment as requisite keys to freedom. To Paul, by naming these "physical, economic, and linguistic traps," feminist critics seek to "recognize, define, and accord value to otherness" (192–93). Patricia Meyer Spacks, in *The Female Imagination*, finds that "for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned them-

selves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns, or at least slightly skewed from them. The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles and male ones make a difference in female writing" (7). Elaine Showalter notes an "imaginative continuum" in women's writing, with repeating patterns and images (12). These images are often what we call "romantic": idealized depictions of the countryside, of wistful childhood. These images, too, are being re-visioned. Now to their application and their connection to children's books, with their often-romanticized landscapes.

ROMANTICISM

Romanticism as a literary movement is representative of a literary period that is being re-examined by feminist criticism, with all of its assumptions questioned. The term is usually associated with William Wordsworth and his other early nineteenth-century literary colleagues who established a particular myth of man in nature. I use the term "man" very intentionally, as that is the predominant gender subject of romantic poetry. The term itself, as defined in a literary dictionary, is described as "a literary and philosophical movement which tends to see the individual at the very center of all life and all experience, and it places him, therefore, at the center of all art, making literature most valuable as an expression of his unique feelings and particular attitudes" (431). Romanticism privileges the creative function of the Imagination, seeing art as an intuitive form of a higher truth; it sees in Nature the revelation of divine nature as well as the subject of the most primitive and pure of arts. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes himself at age five as a "naked savage"; when he is nine, he plunders birds' nests and steals a shepherd's boat. He reads the forbidden folklore: Jack the Giant Killer, Robin Hood, Sabra in the forest with St. George. This wandering through hill and dale in the wilds and in books, where natural powers are at play, "teach as Nature teaches." The Romanticism is based on freedom to explore, to move beyond the community, to encounter Nature in its rough-and-ready form, to commune with this Nature for personal revelation. This literary landscape is

grounded on a particular freedom and autonomy to move, to adventure—what Judith Plotz calls "supra-social independence" (72). The emphasis is on the search for the Absolute, the Ideal, by the transcendence of the actual. The subject for this search is the solitary poet in nature, most specifically, the work of six male poets: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and John Keats. As Anne Mellor points out, there existed "hundreds of female and male writers working in the early nineteenth century, all those novelists, essayists, journalists, diarists, and letter-writers who had narratives to tell other than those plotted as "natural supernaturalism' or 'the romantic sublime' or 'romantic irony'" (8).

A feminist re-evaluation is important for an understanding of any subsequent literary presentations of women, for, as Northrop Frye reminds us, "Romanticism is the mythical structure within which the literature of our day is still operating, and which with the Romantic movement completed its first major phase" (49). Notions of Romanticism have colored the very fabric of children's literature, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. James Holt McGavran stresses the influence of the Romantic concept of childhood in its content, psychological power, and narrative structure (9). Revisionist critics speak of "the Romantic ideology" that has shaped much of the historiography of children's literature into dichotomous paradigms: instruction vs. amusement, with the didactic moral tale disadvantageously posed against the fantastic fairy tale. F. J. Harvey, the definitive historian of the field for many years, defined children's books as "printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure" (1), with a subsequent devaluation of works deemed less than pleasurable, such as the genre of books known in the history as "The Moral Tale," many of which were written by women reformers of the late eighteenth century. These stories were considered too unimaginative and instructive by nature to be considered pleasing. This bias toward one form of writing—adventurous and fantastic fiction and verse—precluded a serious consideration of other genres and their readers' pleasures. This interpretation persists throughout most texts and essays on the history of children's literature. The Romantics, in particular, have been privileged in the history as the poets who raised the consciousness of the literary cul-

ture to folklore, to mystical communion with Nature, to the elevation of the child as subject and object of children's literature. In truth, as many of the essays in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England* attest, the moral tale and fairy tale share imaginative and instructive boundaries; one is not necessarily opposed to the other, and each needs to be examined dialectically in terms of its gender and genre. Feminist criticism offers a plurality of approach to open the closed borders of canon.

FEMININE ROMANTICISM

Feminist literary historians question the universality of this particular strand of Romanticism. Who were the women writers—and their literary formats—during this period? And what about their sense of place, their contextual variations on the Romantic developmental model? The female variant of Romanticism is different, based on a sense of community, of shared rather than solitary experiences. Women did not have the leisure, the freedom, to wander from home, to adventure into the depths of Nature for a sense of mystical communion or adversarial conflict. Women tended to stay close to home, to build gardens, to create communities, to espouse harmony, and it is in this sphere that their Romanticism resides. Recently, feminist scholars, such as Anne Mellor and Mitzi Myers, have challenged the conventional view of high romanticism: the notion that only the aesthetics of the leading male poets bear weight. To Mitzi Myers, the discourse about the period and its literary production has been dominated by a peculiar masculine mythology of lyrical development, "the solitary, untrammeled lad's maturation amid—and privileged access to—ennobling nature" ("Taking Care" 2). While male tropes of wilderness have been valorized as romanticism in its finest spirit, women's developmental stories and imagined communities have been relegated to nonliterary status, as educational treatises, pictures of everyday life, or simpy nursery fare.

What is the nature of feminine Romanticism, as defined by Anne Mellor, Mitzi Myers, and other revisionist scholars of the period? First, a variety of nontraditional modes exist, such as letters, journals, educational tracts, and children's lit-

erature. Rather than the assertion of the individual self, there is a spirit of dialogue and community. An alternative Romanticism is built on a model of collaboration and a domestically cultured Nature. Maternal values are inscribed on the landscape, a sense of pastoral. Mitzi Myers analyzes Maria Edgeworth's story, "The Cherry Orchard," as an example of how an alternative Romanticism grounded in domestic detail and familial values functioned as a utopian vision for children—a realistic, reformist fantasy, however conflicting that may sound to our notion of realistic and fantastic genres. Edgeworth portrays a children's community as a pastoral, where the emphasis is not on individual expression—the Romantic poet's solitary sublime—but, instead, on communal work and play ("Taking Care" 8). While Romanticism dwells on the *self*, feminine Romanticism constructs a variation: the *self-in-relation*.

KATE GREENAWAY'S ROMANTICISM

How can these various strands of feminist criticism—a weave of literary and psychological insight—be applied to children's picture books? How can a late-Victorian children's author and illustrator be interpreted along feminist lines that open up new ways of seeing? Kate Greenaway's work is generally regarded as romantic, nostalgic, even decidedly sentimental. To Alison Lurie, Greenaway's romantic world is "a greeting card version of Wordsworthian innocence, untouched by age, dirt, poverty, illness, care, or sin" (15). Patricia Dooley describes Greenaway's work as a touchstone in children's literature "because it approaches the limits of licensed sentimentality" (63). The most strident comment comes from Maurice Sendak, who describes Greenaway's perhaps most famous work, *Mother Goose*, as "a lovely but antiseptic affair . . . a chilly Victorianism at the heart of her prim interpretation" (17). Can her work be viewed within more problematic boundaries, be re-visioned?

First, to the woman herself and her work, the context of the art within its period. Kate Greenaway's prime was in the 1880s, although she died in 1901, which positions her in both centuries, with conjoined influence. Kate Greenaway's picture books modeled childhood for the late Victorians as a

garden idyll, with winsome children frolicking in pasture lands or village greens, surrounded by verdant images, and her influence remains in the feminine romanticism of modern children's book illustration. The perspective that I want to emphasize is her *innovation*, the imaginative childhood world she created in her art. Barbara Bader, surveying the origins of the modern American picture book, appreciates Greenaway's departure from the traditional renderings of childhood classics—the many illustrated versions of folktales, for example—toward inventions of her own imagination, to creating books not only *for* but *about* children (4). Greenaway set the example for others to follow, a persistent strain of feminine romanticism in children's literature: a pastoral of childhood. Historicizing the appeal of Greenaway for her day helps to establish whatever continuities or divergences exist today.

Kate Greenaway's drawings of old-fashioned girls and boys, which appeared in the 1870s, presented an idyllic childhood, inhabited by children and young maidens in sophisticated rural simplicity. Greenaway's stylized children were not ostensibly contemporary but appeared old-fashioned in dress, reminiscent of the late-eighteenth century and redolent of village life still preserved in small pockets of late-nineteenth century English countryside. In actuality, Greenaway subtly drew upon the most stylish of contemporary motifs from the aesthetic movement: Queen Anne architecture, William Morris chairs, sunflowers and daisies, Japanese blue-and-white china (the rage), and the soft colors much in vogue, the apple-blossom pinks and moss-greens. To architectural historian Mark Girouard, surveying the Queen Anne Movement, 1860–1900, the picture books of Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, and Randolph Caldecott were "secret persuaders," more convincing than any prose of the need for artistic education, especially in the nursery (139). While parents in the 1850s sought books for more didactic purposes, the generation of the 1870s sought books to inculcate the arts. Somehow such artistic education might offset the growing industrialization and materialism of Victorian culture—by a feminine influence.

Greenaway's work was particularly receptive as a womanly art form. As Pamela Gerrish Nunn writes in *Victorian Women Artists*, a certain kind of feminine artistry was en-

couraged, one in which "the home and person were the only sites congenial to women's creativity" (20). While genius was suspect, women were allowed to develop talents in craft or design, which included children's book illustration. Nunn points out that by the end of the nineteenth century, the few women artists who were successful exemplified the acceptable models. The success of the three cited—Helen Allingham, Elizabeth (Thompson) Lady Butler, and Kate Greenaway—indicates the sort of female artist that the late-nineteenth century would accept. The persistent popularity of Allingham and Greenaway demonstrated the popular appeal of a traditionally feminine art, described as "small in scale; watercolour; addressing itself uncritically to domestic experience and incident, the appearance and behavior of children, the quaint and the picturesque; pleasing by its aesthetic charm but not arresting by its creative genius" (220).

Within these constraining walls, Kate Greenaway was able to create a private universe, what Tolkein calls a "secondary world," which we want to enter in imagination. To Martin Hardie, a contemporary artist and librarian from the Victoria and Albert Museum, Greenaway distinguished herself through "the directness of the pictorial motives" that create a particular idealized world:

> ". . . a little kingdom of her own, a kingdom like island-valley of Avilon, 'deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns', a land of flowers and gardens, of red-brick houses with dormer windows, peopled with charming children clad in long, high-waisted gowns, muffs, pelisses, and sun-bonnets. In all her work there is a 'sweet reasonableness', an atmosphere of old-world peace and simple piety that recalls Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* and 'fresh sheets that smell of lavender.' The curtains and frocks of dainty chintz and dimity, the houses with the reddest of red bricks, the gardens green as green can be, the little lads and lasses 'with rosy cheeks and flaxen curls', tumbling, toddling, dancing, singing—all make for happiness, all are 'for the best in the best of all possible worlds' " (277)

To William Feaver, Greenaway appealed by her "mob-capped infants playing adult in model villages" (17). Greenaway's world was securely in the past, the past of Blake's *Songs of*

Innocence, of Jane and Ann Taylor's poetry, or of Maria Edgeworth's "The Cherry Orchard," which were some of Greenaway's favorite works from her childhood. Greenaway re-created an idealized golden age, based on her memories of Rolleston, a remote country village in Nottinghamshire where she spent important early years and many summers visiting family. Here she was touched by the commonplace sights of an old-fashioned England: villagers in their antiquated eighteenth-century dress; men working in the fields in embroidered smocks dyed blue; women waring their Sunday-best of frilly lace and large poke bonnets; and roads edged with primroses or fields filled with poppies and singing haymakers. It was a world rich in quotidian details, country vernacular, in the mythic motherland threatened by William Blake's "dark Satanic mills." John Ruskin, praising her work for restoring elements of fantasy and beauty rapidly disappearing in industrial England, noted, "There are no railroads in it to carry the children away . . . no vestige of science, civilization, economic arrangements, or commercial enterprise" (152). The secondary world which Greenaway creates is a pristine landscape of rarefied play, "a child's garden of verses," a "Book of Days." Greenaway's archaic utopia fit well within the concerns of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century romanticism—in particular, feminine romanticism. Her attention to domestic life and vernacular detail, to a community of children, to caretaking play and women's ways of cooperative works, all speak of an alternative female Romanticism.

What is the feminine way of knowing we see in Greenaway? Let us examine the only two books that she both wrote and illustrated for evidence of her expressiveness: *Under the Window* (1879) and *Marigold Garden* (1885). The assumption is that these works, designed around text and image, would best reveal Greenaway's artistic intentions. While Greenaway is known to have contributed illustrations to some 150 books, she is best known for approximately fifteen picture books, most of which were engraved and printed by Edmund Evans, the virtuoso Victorian printer. The texts of all but two of these fifteen or so books rely on folklore, such as *Mother Goose*, or *A Apple Pie*; or on works of other authors, such as Robert Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* or Bret Harte's *The Queen of the Pirate Isle*.

Greenaway's first picture book launched her career and created what was known as "The Greenaway Vogue," the spectacular commercial appeal of her work and its many imitations. *Under the Window* (1879) is a collection of verses and drawings based on her memories of the countryside and village of Rolleston, street rhymes of London, and favorite childhood stories. In what was a very assertive move for a young woman in the 1870s, Greenaway urged her father, who was in the engraving business, to show the manuscript to Edmund Evans, a noted colleague. Evans had already created successful productions of Walter Crane's toybooks and had recently engaged Randolph Caldecott for a similar series. Greenaway at this time had a livelihood of sorts doing artwork for greeting cards, what was then a novelty. She worked for the firm of Marcus Ward, one of the innovators of the Christmas card. From the beginning her designs tended to be children, singly or in pairs. She clothed her figures in the old-fashioned, eighteenth-century-style clothing so common in Rolleston, the country place she frequented as a child, a sleepy village where the fashions were hardly current, and townsfolk continued to wear the same styles of the previous century: high-waisted dresses, smocks, and mob-caps. Greenaway adapted her greeting-card styles to a larger landscape of the picture book and accompanied these drawings with her own verse, awkward but heartfelt poetry based on nursery morals and make-believe. When Kate and her father showed the notebook and drawings to Edmund Evans, he wrote in his *Reminiscences*: "I bought them at once, for I thought they would make a telling children's book" (61).

Under the Window's subfenestral world is full of openings as well as suggestive of the ground, the underground of life. The title comes from the opening verse, which begins: "Under the window is my garden,/Where sweet, sweet flowers grow." The association throughout is organic: an open door to a backyard garden, in shades of russets, corn yellow and blue-green; apples bearing the fresh crimson coloring of the orchard, gathered by small girls into their fragile posy baskets; a bower of rosebuds, a garland of lilies. Decorative flower motifs become of a piece with a scene, not mere ornament. The flowers are picked from cottage gardens inspired by nature: native plants, hardy perennials, wildflowers, ornamental grasses—a departure from the Augustan geometry of

landscape style.

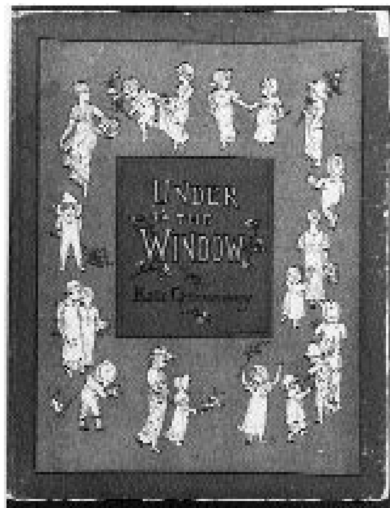
The composition bespeaks an exuberance of childlike nature and a framing of significant scenes from that childhood. The jacket cover shows a circle of children, a spirited dance around the page: a procession of singing, swaying, flowering young life, all sides showing, all movement spontaneous and unconscious, trailing off into time. The brilliantly conceived table of contents is a promise of a Midsummer Night's dream, a light-hearted parody of adult ritual. Covering five pages, the contents offer a miniature drawing and verse from each of the pages to follow. Brian Alderson, in his study of the narrative tradition of British children's book illustration, notes Greenaway and Evans's "extraordinarily daring technical effects" and concludes, "There had never been so completely composed a picture book before this time. . . ." (76).

The tone of the illustrations is striking in its communal spirit. This is a feminized community, where the illustrations show children congregating, working on the soil, pulling a younger sibling in a wagon, being held in mother's arms. Her children are dressed in Georgian-styled finery, but their movements, expressions, and fantasies belie the adornment. Girls play hoops, bat shuttlecocks, or hold a younger brother's hand. The mood is playful, even when the children look somber; a suggestion of pre-Raphaelite melancholy. Contrary images of beauty and terror do exist: a goblin carrying away a child, witches promising a ride, images suggestive of folklore, a naturalistic world celebrated as a whole. The rich image-making, much more than the text itself, seems to stress nurturance, connectedness, affiliation—qualities at variance with the conventional Romantic posture of a solitary soul alone in Nature, at strife or conflict for personal revelation.

What a contrast exists when we look at the first and most successful of the many imitations of *Under the Window* —J. G. Sowerby and H. H. Emmerson's *Afternoon Tea* (1880). In my study of these two works, I noted how the imitation sentimentalized the original, deleting any nightmare images other than the imagined collision with parental authority or conduct book (53). Male figures predominate on the page, instructing girls in their play, leading fearful female companions, or just plain misbehaving. Greenaway's illustrative

world, in contrast, is distinctly feminized.

Greenaway's only other work she both authored and illustrated, *Marigold Garden* (1885), shows less freshness of vision than exhibited in her early book, although a consistency in style. The book represented a more experienced effort on her part to create a unified book of art and poetry, despite its mixed reviews. The frontispiece is similar to the jacket cover of *Under the Window*. The garland processional is more centered in flowers, both in the inner circle and connecting the figures' dance, a kind of May Day celebration. The jacket shows three girls peering out beyond a garden



wall, similar to the opening page of *Under the Window*, where three younger children gaze out beyond an open window. Interesting grouping of children are depicted: watching a puppet show, with mothers holding babes, brothers bearing younger siblings on shoulders, or older girls holding hands of younger ones, girls carrying dolls; a dancing family of children, trailing off the page into the predominant white space; two girls climbing a ladder illustrating a poem "To Mystery Land;" and spirited characters racing across a wall top, the village viewed below; a ring-of-roses dance of cherubic young children. If this is a world onto itself—which Greenaway persuades me—it is a world without fathers or adult males, where boys dress akin to girls, where the leadership is femi-

nine, and the overall mood is a pastoral, a place apart from reality.

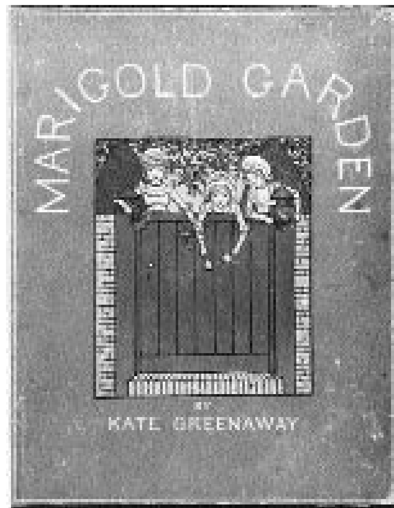
These two key works of Greenaway reflect her childhood reading. Her first biographers, Spielmann and Layard (1905), noted the influence of her early reading, in particular her affinity for Maria Edgeworth's fiction as well as Ann and Jane Taylor's poetry (22). Greenaway's work shows the influence of the Georgian tradition: books such as *The Path of Learning Strewed with Roses*, *May Day*, *Parlour Teacher*, *The Good Child's Delight*, *Early Seeds to Produce Spring Flowers*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. Gleeson White, in his seminal criticism of children's book illustration, *Children's Books and Their Illustrators* (first published as a special issue of the art periodical *The Studio* for 1897–98) noticed a connection between Greenaway's style and the children's books of the 1820s, pointing to a title-page illustration from John Harris's *Paths of Learning Strewed With Flowers, or English Grammar Illustrated* (1820), depicting a lithe young maiden in a loose, high-waisted gown, flinging flowers from a posy basket. This kind of intertextuality suggests a female tradition in children's book illustration, from the Georgian period to the late Victorian, and again into the modern age, where many of these flower-strewn, child-processioning, maternal images become incorporated into the imagination of the artist contemplating the child within.

FEMINIST AESTHETICS OF PICTURE BOOKS

Where do picture books and feminist aesthetic intersect? Feminist aesthetics is an application of feminist criticism to the arts. To Josephine Donovan, a feminist aesthetic provides "for the integration into the critical process of the experience denoted as 'feminine' in our culture" (79). To Christine Battersby, a feminist aesthetic reconstructs history from the point of view of a new value system, which "renders visible, interprets, and also evaluates the achievement of great, individual women artists" (11). To Marilyn French, a feminist aesthetic approaches reality from a feminist perspective and endorses female experience. Picture books provide a rich resource for such a construction.

The picture book tradition in the last century shows a

commanding role for this art form. The periodical press in the 1880s heralded not only Greenaway's work, but the continued artistry of the picture book format, for upholding the highest qualities of art. One example, quoted in my study of the reception of Victorian children's picture books, may suffice. *Art Journal* (1881) noted the startling difference between the toybooks of twenty years ago and the picture books of the present. The earlier books were described as "primitive" and "clumsy" in conception and craftsmanship. But now, the journal proclaimed, "Art for the nursery has become Art indeed" (36).



The relevance of this Victorian phenomenon to modern picture book ascendancy is in the association with Art. In both the 1880s and, a century later, 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis is on the picture book as commanding a dual audience of child and adult; as experimenting with design, color, and composition; and as communicating an elevated status to children and their books.

Picture books then and now are privileged with a certain stature. Artists like Maurice Sendak, Chris Van Allsburg, David Macauley, Janet and Allan Ahlbergs, and Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith enjoy a wide-range of simple and sophisticated readers and exemplify the picture book as literary innovator. In the late-Victorian age, artists like Kate Greenaway,

Randolph Caldecott, and Walter Crane were also highly esteemed by critic as well as consumers. In my study of the reception of picture books, 1880–1990, I noted the lack of rigid demarcation between adult and children's literature as one of the most distinctive characteristics of the period (40–42). The "cultural work," to borrow Jane Tompkins's term, of picture books seems to encompass an aesthetic that implies child and adult, that seeks to mediate between the two. As scholars like Cathy Davidson and other historians of the book have noted, *a text is not just a text*. The life of the picture book is clearly that of a cultural object with something to say to both innocent and experienced eyes. Perry Nodelman has observed in his work on the art of picture books that pictures convey a different kind of information from words, one more based on the *meanings* of visual objects as well as shapes, colors, and styles. These meanings, as cognitive psychologists have shown, are based on a schemata already existing, whereby we build one observation and piece of knowledge upon another. This knowledge is culturally structured and historical; even the simplest books are highly ideological within a particular context. Nodelman observes the connection between attitudes toward children in the nineteenth century and the influence of picture books, ". . . between the pure sensual pleasure offered by brightly colored pictures and the tolerance for and delight in the innocent joys of childhood that developed in England and America during the course of the nineteenth century" (3). Such attitudes, he concludes, persist and explain the popularity of the picture book today.

With that in mind, my first observation of feminine aesthetics is that it is a public as well as private act of persuasion. Certain picture books transcend the ordinary and reach an elusive audience with a particular appeal. Greenaway's work contained aesthetic motifs, favored by the art-conscious devotees of her day. The Queen Anne architecture, Japanese art, William Morris chairs, blue-and-white china, pastel shades, and images of lilies, sunflowers, and peacocks resonated to a certain approach to children: an enlightened conviction that children were an important piece of the whole cloth of beauty, and that children deserved to be educated to such a heightened consciousness of life. Obviously, to some consumers, the code implied in her style, the implicit mes-

sage of the images, was strictly fashionable without further ado. But the espousal of Greenaway's art by critics like John Ruskin, among others who championed her work in art journals and lectures, suggests that many people could reach many things in her art, some of rather abstract and philosophical stance. Children were subsumed under the province of art, a protective border.

If a feminine aesthetic appreciates the resonance of picture book art and their empowerment as cultural work with myth-making power, it also embues these signs with feminist import. The viewer is like "the resisting reader" (Judith Fetterley's words), with subtle, subversive eyes. Rather than seeing domestic scenes as merely sentimental, or dismissing a static action or serious tone as vapid, a feminist aesthetic looks to qualities of a feminine community: to women's ways of knowing, to an ethic of care and responsibility, to values of collaboration and mediation, to the strong identification of mother and daughter, to maternal thinking. The individual images are contextualized, placed within a continuum of images of a domestically cultured natural world. The tone is pastoral, utopian, with pronounced chords of nurturance and peacemaking striking the vernacular, the quotidian details of the day. A pastoral is distinguished by its difference from surroundings. It is a natural and beatific place, as opposed to the sullied world beyond. As an oasis, the pastoral presents a picture of life as it could be. It is a world of learning, where education is as radical as any reformist fantasies, where the care and nurture of children demonstrates whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it. It is a world of the imagination writ large. As Northrop Frye reminds us in his book, *The Educated Imagination*, the province of literature is "the power of constructing possible models of human experience," the motive for metaphor (22). To Frye, this indeed is the real meaning of education: "articulating the dream of a lost paradise," the world we want rather than the world we have (6–7).

A feminist aesthetics of the picture book is politically charged with that kind of agenda: *the world we want rather than the world we have*. A feminist aesthetics believes in the artistic power of images to shape consciousness, to create imaginary constructs, to inspire re-vision. The feminist aesthetic belongs to the feminine tradition of women as educa-

tors and nurturers raising a generation to an appreciation of multiple meanings and possibilities. The feminist aesthetic is based on the psychological premise that the text of a book can enter the text of our lives, that images make images, and may bring hope, even healing. In the words of many a *New England Primer*, "My book and heart shall never part." The feminist aesthetic is grounded in the humanistic belief that children belong to an ecology of childhood, a felicitous space. The poet W. B. Yeats once said, in short, that for every one there is an image, which if we would but dwell on it, that image could guide our lives. For me, it is a Greenaway landscape, just under the window, behind the garden wall.

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