

CHILDREN'S  
CULTURE AND THE  
AVANT-GARDE  
Painting in Paris, 1890–1915



Marilynn Strasser Olson



CHILDREN'S CULTURE  
AND THE  
AVANT-GARDE

**Children's Literature and Culture**

Jack Zipes, *Series Editor*

For a complete series list, please visit  
routledge.com

Ursula K. Leguin *Beyond Genre  
Literature for Children and Adults*  
Mike Cadden

Twice-Told Children's Tales  
Edited by Betty Greenway

Diana Wynne Jones  
*The Fantastic Tradition and Children's  
Literature*  
Farah Mendlesohn

Childhood and Children's Books in  
Early Modern Europe, 1550–1800  
Edited by Andrea Immel and  
Michael Witmore

Voracious Children  
*Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature*  
Carolyn Daniel

National Character in South African  
Children's Literature  
Elwyn Jenkins

Myth, Symbol, and Meaning in  
Mary Poppins  
*The Governess as Provocateur*  
Georgia Grilli

A Critical History of French Children's  
Literature, Vol. 1 & 2  
Penny Brown

Once Upon a Time in a Different World  
*Issues and Ideas in African American  
Children's Literature*  
Neal A. Lester

The Gothic in Children's Literature  
*Haunting the Borders*  
Edited by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats,  
and Roderick McGillis

Reading Victorian Schoolrooms  
*Childhood and Education in  
Nineteenth-Century Fiction*  
Elizabeth Gargano

Soon Come Home to This Island  
*West Indians in British Children's Literature*  
Karen Sands-O'Connor

Boys in Children's Literature and  
Popular Culture  
*Masculinity, Abjection, and the  
Fictional Child*  
Annette Wannamaker

Into the Closet  
*Cross-dressing and the Gendered Body  
in Children's Literature*  
Victoria Flanagan

Russian Children's Literature and Culture  
Edited by Marina Balina and  
Larissa Rudova

The Outside Child In and Out of the Book  
Christine Wilkie-Stibbs

Representing Africa in Children's Literature  
*Old and New Ways of Seeing*  
Vivian Yenika-Agbaw

The Fantasy of Family  
*Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature  
and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal*  
Liz Thiel

From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood  
*Children's Literature and the Construction  
of Canadian Identity*  
Elizabeth A. Galway

The Family in English Children's  
Literature  
Ann Alston

Enterprising Youth  
*Social Values and Acculturation in  
Nineteenth-Century American  
Children's Literature*  
Monika Elbert

Constructing Adolescence in  
Fantastic Realism  
Alison Waller

Crossover Fiction  
*Global and Historical Perspectives*  
Sandra L. Beckett

The Crossover Novel  
*Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its  
Adult Readership*  
Rachel Falconer

Shakespeare in Children's Literature  
*Gender and Cultural Capital*  
Erica Hateley

Critical Approaches to Food in  
Children's Literature  
Edited by Kara K. Keeling and  
Scott T. Pollard

Neo-Imperialism in Children's Literature  
About Africa  
*A Study of Contemporary Fiction*  
Yulisa Amadu Maddy and Donnarae  
MacCann

Death, Gender and Sexuality in  
Contemporary Adolescent Literature  
Kathryn James

Fundamental Concepts of Children's  
Literature Research  
*Literary and Sociological Approaches*  
Hans-Heino Ewers

Children's Fiction about 9/11  
*Ethnic, Heroic and National Identities*  
Jo Lampert

The Place of Lewis Carroll in Children's  
Literature  
Jan Susina

Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature  
for Young Readers  
Maria Nikolajeva

"Juvenile" Literature and British Society,  
1850–1950  
*The Age of Adolescence*  
Charles Ferrall and Anna Jackson

Picturing the Wolf in Children's  
Literature  
Debra Mitts-Smith

New Directions in Picturebook Research  
Edited by Teresa Colomer, Bettina  
Kümmerling-Meibauer, Cecilia Silva-Díaz

The Role of Translators in Children's  
Literature  
*Invisible Storytellers*  
Gillian Lathey

The Children's Book Business  
*Lessons from the Long Eighteenth Century*  
Lissa Paul

Humor in Contemporary Junior Literature  
Julie Cross

Innocence, Heterosexuality, and the  
Queerness of Children's Literature  
Tison Pugh

Reading the Adolescent Romance  
*Sweet Valley and the Popular Young Adult  
Romance Novel*  
Amy S. Pattee

Irish Children's Literature and Culture  
*New Perspectives on Contemporary  
Writing*  
Edited by Valerie Coghlan and  
Keith O'Sullivan

Beyond Pippi Longstocking  
*Intermedial and International Perspectives  
on Astrid Lindgren's Works*  
Edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer  
and Astrid Surmatz

Contemporary English-Language  
Indian Children's Literature:  
*Representations of Nation, Culture,  
and the New Indian Girl*  
Michelle Superle

Re-visioning Historical Fiction  
*The Past through Modern Eyes*  
Kim Wilson

The Myth of Persephone in Girls'  
Fantasy Literature  
Holly Virginia Blackford

Pinocchio, Puppets and Modernity  
*The Mechanical Body*  
Edited by Katia Pizzi

Crossover Picturebooks  
*A Genre for All Ages*  
Sandra L. Beckett

Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary  
Imagination  
Kirsten Stirling

Landscape in Children's Literature  
Jane Suzanne Carroll

Colonial India in Children's Literature  
Supriya Goswami

Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde  
*Painting in Paris, 1890–1915*  
Marilynn Olson



CHILDREN'S CULTURE  
AND THE  
AVANT-GARDE

Painting in Paris, 1890–1915

MARILYNN STRASSER OLSON

First published 2013  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2013 Taylor & Francis

The right of Marilynn Strasser Olson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*  
Olson, Marilynn Strasser.

Children's culture and the avant-garde : painting in Paris, 1890–1915 / by Marilynn Strasser Olson.

p. cm. — (Children's literature and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Children's literature—History and criticism. 2. Avant-garde (Aesthetics)—France—Paris. 3. Art and literature—France—History—19th century. 4. Art and literature—France—History—20th century. 5. Children in art. 6. Children in literature. I. Title.

PN1009.5.S63O47 2012

809'.89282—dc23

2012008696

ISBN13: 978-0-415-87268-3 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-10936-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Minion  
by IBT Global.

*To Don and Christopher*



# CONTENTS

List of Figures		xi
Series Editor's Foreword		xiii
Acknowledgments		xv
<b>Introduction</b>	Higglety-Pigglety Modernism	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	Turn-of-the-Century Grotesque: The Uptons' Golliwogg in Context	19
<b>Chapter 2</b>	Henri Rousseau: Jungles Transformed	35
<b>Chapter 3</b>	William Nicholson: A Swashbuckling Time	57
<b>Chapter 4</b>	Paula Modersohn-Becker: Someone Who Has a Long Road in Front of Her Doesn't Run	89
<b>Chapter 5</b>	Marc Chagall: I Was Not Born Simply to Seek Pleasure	127
<b>Conclusion</b>		155
Notes		161
Bibliography		203
Index		219



## FIGURES

<b>Cover:</b>	<i>Senecio</i> (1922), Paul Klee, and <i>Peggy's Head</i> , Florence Upton from <i>Two Dutch Dolls and a "Golliwogg"</i> .	
1.1	Florence Upton. Advertising flyer for <i>The Golliwogg's Bicycle Club</i> (1986).	21
1.2	Detail of Number 226, <i>Die Freunde aus der Kinderzeit</i> , broadside by Eduard Ille, München, Braun & Schneider, 1858.	22
1.3	Florence Upton. <i>The Golliwogg in War!</i>	23
1.4	Florence Upton. <i>Golliwogg at the Seaside</i> (1898).	27
1.5	Pablo Picasso. <i>Nu sur fond rouge</i> (1906).	29
2.1	<i>Drame sanglant dans une ménagerie</i> . Detail of a recurring cover motif. <i>Le Petit Journal</i> (Janvier 24, 1904).	42
2.2	Henri Rousseau. <i>Horse Attacked by a Jaguar</i> (1910).	46
2.3	Henri Rousseau (dit le Douanier Rousseau). <i>La Charmeuse de Serpents</i> (1907).	49
3.1	William Nicholson. Self-portrait as pavement artist from <i>An Alphabet</i> .	62
3.2	William Nicholson. <i>A Young Nobleman Surveys the City</i> .	79
3.3	William Nicholson. Heinemann poster for <i>Clever Bill</i> .	82
3.4	William Nicholson. [She Taught Them]— <i>How to Dance</i> .	85

xii • Figures

4.1	Paula Modersohn-Becker. <i>Reclining Mother and Child II</i> (summer 1906).	103
4.2	Rue de la Grande Chaumière (ca. 1905).	114
4.3	Paula Modersohn-Becker-Stiftung. <i>Sitting Girl</i> (ca. 1899).	121
4.4	Paula Modersohn-Becker. <i>Sitting Nude Girl with Vase</i> (1906/1907).	124
5.1	Marc Chagall. <i>The Cowshed</i> (1917).	132
5.2	Marc Chagall. <i>View from a Window, Vitebsk</i> (1914/1915).	140
5.3	Marc Chagall. <i>Over Vitebsk</i> (1914).	145
5.4	Marc Chagall. <i>I and the Village</i> (1911).	152

## Series Editor's Foreword

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term children to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Owing to the fact that the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. While the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last 50 years, but there have also been radical shifts in the scholarship that deals with these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

Jack Zipes



# Acknowledgments

With grateful thanks:

Gillian Adams, Angela Ingram, Caroline Jones, Michael Joseph, Katherine Ledbetter, Chris Martin, Anne Morey, Susan Morrison, Claudia Nelson, Suzanne Rahn, Teya Rosenberg, Victoria Smith, Elizabeth Stark, Graeme Wend-Walker, and Miriam Williams

For help in obtaining and viewing materials:

Margaret Vaverek of the Alkek Library, Texas State University; Rebecca Duckwitz of the Modersohn-Becker-Stiftung; and the Hill-Stead Museum

For permission to reprint the Golliwogg article, which appeared originally, in a slightly different form, in *Children's Literature* 28 (Yale University Press, 2000)

For support:

Children's Literature Association Grant Committee for support of [Chapter 4](#)

Texas State University for granting Developmental Leave in the fall of 2010

Don and Christopher Olson

For permission to reprint works of art:

Desmond Banks

Modersohn-Becker-Stiftung

Museum d'Orsay

The Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



# Introduction

## Higglety-Pigglety Modernism

I can see Paris as plain as day by just shutting my eyes. The beautiful ladies are always gayly dancing around with pink sunshades and bead purses, and the grand gentlemen are politely dancing and drinking ginger pop.<sup>1</sup>

Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*

Paris, as the “cultural capital” of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was a Mecca for young people who streamed there in the thousands to take life-drawing classes and become artists and liberated people. When forces of social convention close in around a turn-of-the-century fictional child hero, it is not always apparent that Art and some degree of Bohemianism was an option of the time for a substantial number of young people, still less that it was, in some ways, actually encouraged. We see some glimpses: Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm’s pink sunshade, for example, was the gift of Miss Ross, a painter, who had brought it from Paris. The sunshade ends its life as a sacrificial victim in the family well in Riverboro, Maine, but not without having given Rebecca a wider perspective that her rural neighbors lacked.

The bestselling *Trilby* (1894), by *Punch* illustrator and painter George du Maurier, evokes a kind of “college scrape” version of 1850s bohemianism:

“Oh, happy days and happy nights, sacred to art and friendship! Oh, happy times of careless impecuniosity, and youth and hope and health and strength and freedom—with all Paris for a playground, and its dear old unregenerate Latin quarter for a workshop and a home!”<sup>2</sup>

It also points out another feature of the time that impinges on children’s culture, namely, that many children, like Trilby herself, were artist’s models from the time they were born.

In addition to being a long-running youth event, however, the Parisian fin-de-siècle moment also drew on childhood as an inspiration. Painters who hoped to change the way the Academy defined art sometimes turned to the

idea of the primitive to re-define what a Modern art should be doing. Sometimes childhood itself was a site that seemed worthy of investigation. For children's literature specialists, this calls for the question of how "childlike" is defined, in much the same way that while discussing the innovative aspect of "primitive" can be useful, the term itself must be carefully scrutinized.

The avant-garde movement in art, often identified with the kinds of early Modernism around 1900, contains many strands. One might get a consensus that the late nineteenth-century painters—and practitioners in many fields—are simply reacting against *something*: particularly an established set of social or religious or artistic beliefs that no longer appeared viable in a changing world. Because in some ways Modernism appears to be a kind of second round of Romanticism, and we are used to associating childhood with Romanticism, the association of children's culture with the avant-garde seems commonsensical. The painters I will examine, however, demonstrate by their practice and their places of origin that although the connections are many, they are highly varied. And that the definitions used for the early avant-garde are, themselves, slippery.

It seems to make a difference, for example, what particular aspect of life is the target of rebellion. And, because earnest Victorians (who had incorporated aspects of Romanticism) had been decrying social and religious hypocrisy for years in both the plastic and literary arts, the form in which the reaction is couched can be definitive. Henrik Ibsen's plays, which herald many of the Modernist changes in Anglophone literature and the arts, are about hypocrisy and injustice in established social, religious, and gender relations. But the subject of his controversial *Ghosts* (1881) is simply restated in the sentimental and melodramatic *Trilby*: a childlike, though sexually experienced, bohemian model is purer and more righteous in every way than a conventionally religious upper-class family. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century children's literature abounds in examples of rebellious material, in terms of undermining the established order, gender relations, conventional ways of thinking, adult standards, and so on, but the books' status as belonging in the Ibsen rather than the du Maurier camp depends upon individual critical importance attributed to particular topics (Can nihilism be implicit? Must preferring a particular subjective view coincide with the denial of objective reality? Is it acceptable to take up Eastern mysticism while rejecting Western religions?), in addition to the style of the work that through innovation expresses the artist's attempt to embody a new sense of being. In the case of avant-garde art, the style test is generally made in terms of rebellion against the perceived standards of the "Academy."

The "Academy" refers in this discussion primarily to the (French) Salon in Paris and, to a lesser extent, the (English) Royal Academy in London. From the 1760s onward, both the French and the English had art establishments, with the French being the preeminent in international circles. These institutions had grown out of governmentally sponsored schools for art—*École des Beaux-Arts*, Royal Academy—which were meant to foster artistic excellence and national cultural ideals. Their importance depended upon the selective juried shows

that were held annually (or biennially), at which the painters fortunate enough to please the judges were given a chance to display the accepted works before a large public audience, to be reviewed in the newspapers and other journals, to win prizes and status, and very likely to sell paintings. Academic portrait painting, sometimes by women, is mentioned in such works as those of Frances Hodgson Burnett, Rosa Nouchette Carey, and Mrs. Henry de la Pasture because the exhibitions could be an elite social event: often a point is made about a society beauty's portrait attracting much attention from her friends, or a portrait, already sold, being left in the painter's possession for the Academy or Salon.<sup>3</sup> An artist's yearly production was aimed at having an appropriate entry (size and so on could determine appropriateness) for the showing, which could uniquely establish an artistic career. Throughout the nineteenth century, various political and social agendas re-defined who could enter paintings for the Salon (what nationalities, what gender) and gradually offered some other opportunities to show work—for example, the Salon des Refusés (1863) for painters who had been denied a place in the Salon—but the Salon was the international arbiter of painting excellence until late in the century.

When Esther's ne'er-do-well older brother, Fred, in Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Esther* (1884), leaves home for St. John's Woods (a fin-de-siècle artistic locale) in London to collect "broken china" and wear velvet jackets, he is hoping to paint a picture that will be "accepted by the hanging committee."<sup>4</sup> He is a "Bohemian" artist, but while this life style involves a relaxation of formal requirements for social interaction (as well as both young men and women overcoming various taboos about painting from the nude), the aim of the artists is to be great and famous along accepted lines or (as noted here in [Chapter 4](#)) to hone skills that could be made commercially successful in some other way.

The avant-garde, although it co-existed with this milieu, is instead an effort to re-think what Modern art should be, specifically by rejecting what "the hanging committee" had to say. The Academy (discussed further in [Chapter 2](#)) was primarily associated with illusionism in art. This can be roughly defined as painting that attempted through technical skill (perspective, complementary arrangement of colors in the composition, accuracy of proportion, and so on) to create the illusion of three dimensions on the canvas, as well as to convey outward reality in what appeared to be an accurate way, while suffusing it with the artist's own formal and thematic concerns. The belief that there was an overarching reality to convey, and a right way to convey it, underlies the standard. As Robert Herbert notes when describing an example of John Ruskin's art criticism, the greatest art "rises above naturalism to a superior level and exposes the supreme order of the universe in the grandness of the artist's imagination."<sup>5</sup> The painter's imagination may be said to be a kind of mediator between universal truth and the material world.

A hierarchy of excellence in types of paintings was also part of the academic standard, with history paintings praised for their ability to convey the

most noble (or national) ideas. A review from the 1844 Royal Academy reveals this agenda:

A picture by G. Patten representing the *Madness of Hercules*. The hero occupies the centre of the picture, wielding aloft in his left hand his struggling child, while his right grasps a bloody club. His wife is kneeling in the foreground with uplifted arms, and the corpse of one of his victims lies at his feet. In this picture there is much that is good, but upon the whole it is unsatisfactory. The countenance of Hercules is coarse and ferocious, conveying no notion of the dignity of the fallen hero; and there is a want of sublimity throughout the group.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the required sublimity, it can be noted that historical and mythological paintings are paintings with something going on: the people in them are part of a story. Such backstories would have to be known by the (educated) viewer of many academy paintings in order to appreciate how well the painter had succeeded in conveying the noble idea in question. (Who are those people? What are they doing with all those horses? Was this a good thing?) When Esther's little brother in the eponymous Carey novel determines that his first painting, when he is grown, will consist of "the Retreat of the Ten Thousand under Xenophon," he is ambitiously embarking on future greatness, prepared by his juvenile efforts to illustrate scenes out of biblical stories as his Sabbath activity.<sup>7</sup> An artist's choice of a subject not connected with sublimity or not connected with a story, then, might indicate a rejection of the traditional hierarchy.

The issues that arose—or should have been discussed—at the James Whistler v. John Ruskin 1878 libel trial over Ruskin's criticism of Whistler's Nocturne paintings concern this definition by Academic standards of what a painting is, as opposed to a potentially "pleasing decoration."<sup>8</sup> Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, a picture of fireworks over the Cremorne Gardens near his home in London, particularly excited attention at the trial, where its lack of perspective, lack of truth to Nature, lack of finish, lack of meaning, obscurity of form, and so on were approached from many angles, including Ruskin's original contention that he shouldn't be charging so much for inferior workmanship. The jury found for Whistler but awarded him only a farthing damages.

Linda Merrill, in her monograph on the trial, states Ruskin's position (originally in *Modern Painters I*) that the "preciousness" of paintings depends "ultimately on the clearness and justice of the ideas they contained and conveyed," which can be restated as the idea that pictures should be visual treatises, or figures of speech.<sup>9,10</sup> Opposed to this, as Merrill notes, is the non-literary and non-naturalistic way of defining "idea": "the idea of a work by Whistler was contained in and conveyed by its compositional constituents, rather than the objects those elements might incidentally depict. Unlike a picture, which indicated the external world, a nocturne was essentially self-referential."<sup>11</sup>

That a painting can be defined as an arrangement of the “compositional constituents” suggests the abstract art that was still in the future. But it also gives more legitimacy to any viewer’s opinion, even those that were contrary to Whistler’s stated intentions. In practice, a painting containing objects or people from the external world as incidentals, with pictorial harmony and color considered as the desired end, is likely to appear ambiguous. The viewer is free, under these circumstances, to take from the painting whatever seems to him or her to be there; it eliminates the superiority of an art critic of the kind noted above in connection with *Madness of Hercules*. In the case of Whistler paintings (or those of painters such as Sir William Nicholson, who argued his tenets), however, it is also quite hard to keep narrative meaning out of “arrangements”; it does not take a particularly literal-minded viewer to put some in. The Whistler trial demonstrates a changing standard and the beginning of public confusion about what a painting is supposed to be. The Salon des Refusés of 1863 (at which Édouard Manet and Whistler both exhibited) had been such a turning point in France. As Charles Harrison notes, “it was becoming clear that taste in art was no longer something that one dominant section of society could define and control.”<sup>12</sup> Both occasions also demonstrate that there were a variety of ways to oppose the Academy: Painters such as Whistler, or Nicholson, or Manet, who belonged to Whistler’s generation and whose technique and subject matter was open to similar discussion, were not abstract artists, and they painted aspects of the world around them, but they were not “establishment” artists. Nicholson’s visual joking and experiments in illusion are, for example, cheerfully defiant.

In his study, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900–1916*, Christopher Butler notes that the drift away from illusionism is toward subjectivism, which involves exploring a new mode of vision, a new way of seeing.<sup>13</sup> (This is sometimes allied to the idea that without a great universal truth, like God, there is no one true way to capture reality, only various subjective viewpoints. This is frequently not the explicit reason, however, and may be opposed to the stated intentions of the artist.) In the process of determining the best way to find a new form of expression, sometimes an artist felt that inspiration could be found in a culture or in a national artistic style that bore little resemblance to the Academic tradition in which she or he had been raised; this approach to a new way of seeing is often called primitivism.

As Gillian Perry points out, many of the artists now considered “Modern,” were, in their time, actually opposed to the Modern aspects of their era, in particular urbanization.<sup>14</sup> Some of these persons associated themselves with “primitive” forms as a rejection of the accepted way of painting in the Western society from which they increasingly felt distanced.

In the history of children’s literature the anti-urban idea is familiar because it is related to the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Émile*, 1762), which had and continue to have strong influence within our field. The idea that the child falls into error when socialized by church, state, and fashion and that people

living in circumstances that prevent this from happening live more authentic lives encourages the idea of uninstructed childhood or uneducated people as inspirational and true. The child-rearing method advocated by Rousseau in *Émile* inspired vast educational reforms in Europe and North America with far-reaching effects. For example, Juliet Dusinberre and Norman Brosterman have both discussed varying influences that Friedrich Froebel, a radical German educator in the Romantic tradition of Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, had upon English literary Modernism and abstract art, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Froebel, the inventor of the kindergarten, in his theories of development and his classroom methods constitutes so broad a range of influence, however, that much remains to be said. [Chapter 4](#) in this volume discusses a further connection of educational theory to the German avant-garde painter Paula Modersohn-Becker's work.

John Ruskin, like Rousseau, was a major influence on the determination that childhood was a site for artistic innovation. As Robert L. Herbert notes, "Ruskin was so far taken by the abstract elements of the arts that he preferred the early and less polished work of each period he loved." The "abstract and vital" period belonged to its "childhood," while the work that most nearly reached "perfection," was its decadent and least valuable period.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, his championship of the Pre-Raphaelite painters included his repeated statements that coloring in painting had been corrupted by art instruction from the Renaissance on. His art instruction manual (*The Elements of Drawing*, 1857) stressed the importance of seeing with the untutored eye of childhood, when color could be freshly observed from its physical location in Nature, rather than being conventionally used because the painter knew already that grass, for example, was green:

The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify . . . when grass is lighted strongly by the sun in certain directions, it is turned from green into a peculiar and somewhat dusty-looking yellow. If we had been born blind, and were suddenly endowed with sight on a piece of grass thus lighted in some parts by the sun, it would appear to us that part of the grass was green, and part a dusty yellow (very nearly of the colour of primroses); and, if there were primroses near, we should think that the sunlighted grass was another mass of plants of the same sulphur-yellow colour. We should try to gather some of them, and then find that the colour went away from the grass when we stood between it and the sun, but not from the primroses; and by a series of experiments we should find out that the sun was really the cause of the colour in the one—not in the other. We go through such processes of experiment unconsciously in childhood; and having once come to conclusions touching the signification of certain colours, we always suppose

that we *see* what we only know, and have hardly any consciousness of the real aspect of the signs we have learned to interpret. Very few people have any idea that sunlit grass is yellow.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the decision that art would benefit from a separation from fashion, from bad instruction, and from places where these practices held sway emerged in part from a critic who inspired the avant-garde on the one hand, and was simultaneously reviled by experimental painters for tying art to morality on the other.<sup>18</sup>

A “primitive” location, however, did not produce avant-garde work in most cases. Some painters who sought out remote locales painted very traditional or even sentimental pictures of peasant life. Some took up folkloric crafts. But some, such as Paula Modersohn-Becker at Worpswede or Paul Gauguin in Brittany or Tahiti, were attempting to change the way they painted to better reflect their ideas of Modernity. Modersohn-Becker and Gauguin differed widely in the extent to which they idealized the people with whom they interacted in their retreats. But because both worked to understand and illustrate concepts of motherhood and childhood in communities cut off from the capitals of Europe, where authenticity might be found in human and spiritual relationships, and because both significantly altered their styles in non-naturalistic ways in order to capture this insight, they can be called Modernists in that sense.<sup>19</sup>

In the post-Darwinian world, the child and the remote setting was likely to exhibit an uninhibited approach to human sexuality, as well as to the botanical aspects of Nature, in the hands of avant-garde painters. Although neither Tahitians nor residents of the poorhouse at Worpswede were accustomed to nudity in the era in which the painters encountered them, the painters’ conception that people living in remote places were more in tune with life forces is reflected in the sort of pictures each painter produced. The idea that children are, instead of separated from sexual matters, awakening to and reflecting biological forces is part of this conception. Some of the paintings of mothers and children produced by Modernists avoid the eroticism that had encumbered many Academy paintings, while illustrating the sitters’ apparently comfortable acceptance of the natural body. The connection of the “primitive” with the female gender is, naturally, a problem in Modernist, as well as in Academic, work, but the emphasis on motherhood resonates with many of the best-known pieces of children’s literature in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Paris, in this period, was a place where the flora, fauna, and people of the world could be observed, in some sense, without actually leaving for Tahiti, a solution Henri Rousseau embraced. The discussion of differences between “primitive” outsiders—villagers from foreign lands who exhibited their way of life in Parisian parks—and native Parisians is bound to be troubled, but to the painters the “outsiders” were often the same source of inspiration and perspective one might get by going far away. Odilon Redon (1840–1916), a

French symbolist painter, for example, found the villagers who inhabited the exhibitions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation (1881) a source of positive contrast to Parisian (and adult) life:

The way they look at us expresses as much superiority as wildness. . . . One stretched out on the ground . . . follows with his eye, a civilized man who passes by. . . . A rich financier enters . . . while I compare them. How ugly he is, this old bourgeois; and they beautiful, these sublime children of polar life! Their nudity emerges from the earth like a flower of India, in full bloom.<sup>20</sup>

According to Barbara Larson, Redon's exposure to the Tierra del Fuegians, in addition to contemporaneously collected anthropological busts and artifacts, inspired such charcoal images as *Cactus Man*, which suggests the tragedy inherent in the doomed, outworn old Parisian, as well as the beauty of the young, non-European people.<sup>21</sup> The use of non-European figures in the paintings and books considered in this volume in [Chapters 1, 2, and 3](#), undoubtedly owes some of its inception to the Paris that celebrated multiculturalism, colonialism, and anthropological study at a moment when its painters were looking for something new.

In a more famous manifestation of what is called primitivism, avant-garde painters looked for inspiration to another artistic tradition rather than to the remote location or peoples themselves. In this case, the new way of seeing was specifically linked to the style of the artifacts of another place or time. The "primitive" styles that were of interest in this era were more abstract or simplified or monumental than the naturalism of the European tradition. As Perry notes, the relation between the European artists and the artifacts of (often colonized) peoples is complex and not, probably, a matter of "discovering" something from outside the European culture.<sup>22</sup> Again, this is an area where the Modernist painter is often implicated in the colonial fervor of the time, although it is at least conceivable that some painters' allusions to, say, African, motifs might be progressive political statements. The legitimacy of "refreshing" or "rejuvenating" the old world through exposure to a "young" culture depends a great deal on how exposure to the young culture was acquired, as well as to the always present ambivalence of the term "primitive."

The conflation of "childhood" with "primitive" meant that exposure to non-European artifacts also affects children's culture. Although, as Butler notes, "Freud sees childhood as recapitulating the archaic; the childhood of the individual and the primitive beginnings interact," the belief in the particular appropriateness of international folklore and myth for children obviously predates Freud's influence at the turn of the century by decades, just as a Romantic era attempt to refresh English poetry by an infusion from Arabic, Persian, and Indian poems can be seen in the work of Sir William Jones in 1772.<sup>23,24</sup> What the effect of seeing nature and human relations from the perspective of many different cultures has on children is unclear, partly because children's exposure to folktales is mediated by especially prepared versions,