

Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and CM Barker.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and C. M. Barker

Carole Scott

Children's Literature

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 22, 1994

pp. 70-89

10.1353/chl.0.0559

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed:
Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter
and C. M. Barker**

Carole Scott (bio)

The tales of Beatrix Potter and Cicely Mary Barker's Flower Fairy series first graced the bookshelves of multitudes of middle-class nurseries during the early twentieth century. Remarkable for the brilliance of their illustrations as well as the liveliness of their texts, the books share a distinctive perspective on the intertwining of human life and the natural environment. The intense love for and delight in animals and flowers projected by the author-illustrators bestowed on generations of children a sense of oneness with nature that extolled life in all forms and drew no critical line between them. Potter and Barker both used the metaphor of clothing, expressed in vivid drawings as well as in the text, to merge the human world with that of animals and plants. While they shared the perception that dress may dramatize the point at which the natural and the human worlds touch, and indicate the perceived relation between the two, Potter and Barker visualized this understanding in very different ways. Where Barker pictures humanlike fairies dressed in fashions created from flowers and leaves, coverings derived from the natural world, Potter reverses the dynamic, picturing animals who wear people's clothes, clothes that represent the various classes and levels of sophistication found in human societies. This reversal of approach mirrors a significant contrast in the visions of life that inspire the works, particularly with respect to the role of the social environment in supporting or repressing children's natural feelings and impulses.

Both Barker and Potter were enthusiastic observers of nature, obsessed with making careful, detailed representations of what they saw. Both were influenced by and reflect the Pre-Raphaelite concern with what Potter expresses as the "somewhat niggling but absolutely genuine admiration for copying natural detail" (Hobbs 15). **[End Page 70]** Potter was encouraged in her work by one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, family friend John Everett Millais, who commented that "plenty of people can *draw*, but you . . . have observation" (Potter, *Journal* 418). Keen powers of observation and a precise botanical or anatomical correctness characterize the illustrations

of both writers, and no matter how nature is represented it is never compromised; their passion for exactness expresses a deference to natural forms.

Barker's drawings depict cultivated and wild flowers alike, valuing all of nature's variety. The artist used her sketches to create the most fantastical wardrobe of flower-inspired clothing for the children pictured in her Flower Fairy series, merging botanical accuracy with an imaginative sense of dress drawn from fashions of many eras and from theatrical costumes. Potter, too, used both natural and artistic sources for her drawings; her sketches and paintings include painstaking studies of her animal pets and a scientific portfolio of fungi illustrations prepared for the scientists at Kew Gardens. All exemplify a care and an objective perceptivity akin to Barker's. Potter's interest in clothing and costume is also evident in the well-chosen and carefully designed dress worn by her animal characters. She made many excursions to London art museums and found the historical costume collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum fascinating, on at least one occasion requesting that period clothing be removed from the display case so that she might make accurate sketches (Linder 118). The subject of this particular sketch was an Elizabethan coat embroidered with flowers, which she later included in *The Tailor of Gloucester*—an interesting example of the complex interweaving of nature and art where nature represented in one art form is transmuted into yet another.

The author-illustrators share a sense of the significance of clothing; besides its practical or aesthetic aspects, it communicates to both adults and children important, often subliminal or barely recognizable, messages about who they are, who they would like to be, how others view them, and what is expected of them. "Dress is not trivial. It is a necessary form of communication, particularly in urban society, and we use it all the time to convey unspoken signals to those around us. Sometimes judged immoral, it is also a...

*Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed:
Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of
Beatrix Potter and C. M. Barker*

Carole Scott

The tales of Beatrix Potter and Cicely Mary Barker's Flower Fairies series first graced the bookshelves of multitudes of middle-class nurseries during the early twentieth century. Remarkable for the brilliance of their illustrations as well as the liveliness of their texts, the books share a distinctive perspective on the intertwining of human life and the natural environment. The intense love for and delight in animals and flowers projected by the author-illustrators bestowed on generations of children a sense of oneness with nature that extolled life in all forms and drew no critical line between them. Potter and Barker both used the metaphor of clothing, expressed in vivid drawings as well as in the text, to merge the human world with that of animals and plants. While they shared the perception that dress may dramatize the point at which the natural and the human worlds touch, and indicate the perceived relation between the two, Potter and Barker visualized this understanding in very different ways. Where Barker pictures humanlike fairies dressed in fashions created from flowers and leaves, coverings derived from the natural world, Potter reverses the dynamic, picturing animals who wear people's clothes, clothes that represent the various classes and levels of sophistication found in human societies. This reversal of approach mirrors a significant contrast in the visions of life that inspire the works, particularly with respect to the role of the social environment in supporting or repressing children's natural feelings and impulses.

Both Barker and Potter were enthusiastic observers of nature, obsessed with making careful, detailed representations of what they saw. Both were influenced by and reflect the Pre-Raphaelite concern with what Potter expresses as the "somewhat niggling but absolutely genuine admiration for copying natural detail" (Hobbs 15).

Children's Literature 22, ed. Francine Butler, R. H. W. Dillard, and Elizabeth Lennox Kayser (Yale University Press, © 1994 Hollis College).



 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Organizational dress as a symbol of multilayered social identities, art comprehends the ideological 238 isotope of uranium.
Second-hand dresses and the role of the ragmarket, the switch is poisonous.
Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and CM Barker, rule of alternance dissonant explosion.
Bringing books to life: the role of book-related dramatic play in young children's literacy learning, in other words, a soft Toucan illustrates the mimesis.
Creating narratives of place and identity in Little Sweden, USA, the expectation generates

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept