

**Working  
Papers in  
Fashion  
Studies**

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**Edited by Rachel Lifter**

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# **Section 1**

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# **Cultural Studies**



## Chapter 1

### **‘HEAVENLY CREATURES’ IN *VOGUE*: CHILDLIKE FEMININITY AND LONGING FOR INNOCENCE LOST**

MORNA LAING

The childlike character of ideal femininity has long been critiqued in feminist literature. Mary Wollstonecraft (2004 [1792], p.13) lamented the way women, regardless of age, were encouraged to remain in a state of ‘perpetual childhood’: innocent and weak with limited understanding. Much later, in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir (1970) branded woman the *eternal child* in terms of her passivity, inferiority and dependence on men. And finally, Betty Friedan (2010 [1963]) expressed similar concerns about the *feminine mystique* - the ideal prescribed for female behaviour at the time – asking:

Why aren’t girls forced to grow up – to achieve somehow the core of self that will end the unnecessary dilemma, the mistaken choice between femaleness and humanness that is implied in the feminine mystique? (2010, p.246).

For Friedan, one could not be both feminine and fully human; they were mutually exclusive categories.

Overall, their point was that constructing women as childlike served to cement inequalities between the sexes; women were, in effect, honorary children, and as such were not fully adult, making it easy to justify their differential treatment (see also Oakley, 1994; Whelehan, 2000). It is not surprising, then, that feminists have fought for equal – *adult* – standing for women alongside men and have thereby sought to end the infantilisation of women in society. Furthermore, given that both women and children have historically shared ‘minority group status’ (Oakley, 1994), recent sociological discourse has also sought for recognition of children as ‘human beings’ rather than ‘human becomings’ (Qvortrup, 1994, p.4. See also: Holland, 2004; James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 2005; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2004).

Given this historical background, my question is thus: if the infantilised woman denotes inequality between men and women, why do women continue to be represented as childlike in contemporary fashion imagery? And why is such imagery so prevalent? In this chapter, I point to the role that nostalgic longing plays in the (possible) appeal of the woman-child, and the

way it allows such photographs to circulate with little contestation, thereby sanctioning the woman-child as a legitimate ‘subject position’ for contemporary women (Foucault, 1989). I focus on one particular discursive construct of childlike femininity - the *Romantic woman-child* – and question what she might signify today and the ideological implications of this signification for the project of feminism. Images are analysed using techniques of textual analysis, which constitutes one strand of the visual methodology employed in this doctoral research. The final thesis will incorporate both discourse analysis and audience studies to challenge and/or reinforce the conclusions drawn from the textual analysis of imagery.



**Figure 1. Joshua Reynolds, *The Age of Innocence*, c.1788**

### **Romantic Innocence and the Woman-child**

Romantic childhood is shorthand for a particular way of representing girl and boy children, which crystallised in art and literature from the 18th century onwards. In a literary sense, it tends to be associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his work *Émile* (1993 [1762]) where he hailed childhood as the stage of life where man is closest to the state of nature. A central tenet of Rousseau’s thinking, for which he is often cited, is that the attributes of childhood should be valued *in their own right*, for ‘childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling’, and ‘nothing is more foolish than to

try and substitute our [adult] ways [for them]...' (1993, p.64). Such childhood traits included purity, innocence, spontaneity, joie de vivre, and the absence of 'adult' faculties of reason. Importantly, this ideal of Romantic childhood was constructed in binary opposition to adulthood, which was conceptualised as knowing, both socially and sexually (Higonnet, 1998).<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that Rousseau's text concerns the hypothetical upbringing of a *boy* child, hence the title, *Émile*. Girl children, by contrast, were not granted the same privileges - neither in Rousseau's hypothetical text, nor in lived experience - a fact lamented by Rousseau's near contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft (2004, 2010). Yet despite Wollstonecraft's concerns about the childlike nature of adult women at that time, one aspect of Rousseau's treatise to which she did not object was the state of innocence in children, and the importance of its preservation (2004, p.29). In her discussion of public places, she states that:

I must own, I am quite charmed when I see a sweet young creature, shrinking as it were from observation, and listening rather than talking. It is possible a girl may have this manner without having a very good understanding. If it should be so, this diffidence prevents her from being troublesome (Wollstonecraft, 2010 [1787], p.22. See also pp.158-9.)

Thus, although the education of boys and girls differed during this period - a state of affairs supported by Rousseau and challenged by Wollstonecraft - the belief in the innocence of children, and their proximity to nature, seems common between the Enlightenment thinkers.

This ideal is encapsulated, and elaborated upon, in Joshua Reynolds' painting *The Age of Innocence*, c.1788 (see Figure 1), as discussed by Anne Higonnet (1998, pp.24-7). The Romantic child depicted therein 'makes a good show of having no class, no gender, and no thoughts', although this ostensible neutrality is, in fact, the naturalisation of white, upper-class childhood as the 'innocent' ideal, articulated from the standpoint of the adult painter/patron/viewer (Higonnet, 1998, p.24). The paleness of the child's skin is significant given that the term 'blue-blooded', thought to derive from the visible veins of those with fair complexion, historically stood for so-

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<sup>1</sup> Higonnet (1998, p.37) does, however, discuss how this child/adult opposition entails a sort of 'innocence-knowledge see-saw' in that 'a polar opposition of values is also a binary opposition. If one value is defined mainly as the opposite of something else, then perceiving one value always entails thinking of the other value'.

called racial and lineal purity, and as such has racist and anti-Semitic undertones (Lambert, 1989, pp.145).<sup>2</sup>

The tropes of Romantic innocence are often called upon in the construction of childlike femininity in fashion photography. One such example consists in a fashion spread entitled 'Heavenly Creatures' - photographed by Benjamin Alexander Huseby.- which appeared in British *Vogue* in March 2006. The spread references the 1994 Peter Jackson film by the same name, which tells the story of an obsessive friendship and fantasy world between two girls - culminating in the murder of one of the girls' mother, lest the friends be separated<sup>3</sup>. This reference serves to anchor the spread in the realm of girlhood: a meaning reinforced by the models chosen, whose age is decidedly ambiguous given the absence of definite indicators of womanhood. Innocence is conveyed, in the spread as a whole, through the whiteness of the models' dresses against the pastoral backdrop, as well as through their pale skin, harking back to the narrowly defined concept of Romantic innocence.

More specifically, though, two opposing images from the spread (pp.210-1) are of particular interest to this paper. The first image depicts two women - kneeling in a state of partial embrace - although the relationship between them is difficult to define: they could be lovers, sisters, or even mother and daughter. The intensity and emotion conveyed by this scene is then contrasted with the right-hand image: constructed as happy and carefree. A bright blue sky is set against a field of yellow flowers, and three adolescent girls are shown playfully linking arms in a state of ecstatic abandon. Their loosely tied hair and floaty dresses connote a sense of freedom from cares or responsibilities, which is reinforced by the sunlight and their frolicsome game. These images are emblematic of many more that construct femininity through the lens of Romantic innocence, although each representation is particular, in that it adds something specifically of its own to the meaning of the woman-child and the attendant ideology of femininity.

The remainder of this paper theorises the possible appeal of the Romantic woman-child, as depicted in 'Heavenly Creatures', with reference

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<sup>2</sup> Lambert (1989, p.145) further notes that the term 'blue blooded' derives from 'the *sangre azul* claimed by certain families of Castile, as being uncontaminated by Moorish, Jewish or other admixture'.

<sup>3</sup> The reference to Jackson's film imbues the spread with darker undertones, given the fatal injuries inflicted by the girls. Discussion of this aspect will be included in the final thesis.

to the concept of nostalgia: both personal and collective. Two modes of longing are mentioned here because, although universalised, the concept of nostalgia remains culturally and historically specific (Baccolini, 2007, p.173). As such, its workings vary according viewer and context, as mentioned by Raffaella Baccolini and, hopefully, as demonstrated throughout this paper.

### **Nostalgia: From Place to Time to Narrative Reconstruction**

The concept of nostalgia is more recent than that of memory (Baccolini, 2007). Etymologically, the word 'Nostalgia' links the Greek term *nostos* (return) with *algos* (pain), and essentially stands for *the painful desire to return home*. Coined by Swiss medical student Johannes Hoffer in 1688, the term originally denoted a medical condition suffered by Swiss mercenaries whilst serving away from home (Baccolini, 2007, pp.172-3). 'Nostalgia' began to lose its medical connotations in the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century had come to stand for a more general condition - similar to, but not the same as - regret (Prete, 1992 cited in Baccolini, 2007, p.172).

Thus over time, the object of nostalgia shifted from being about *space*, in the geographical sense, to being about *time*: that is, the past. It was Immanuel Kant (2006 [1798], p.71), in the late eighteenth century, who noticed that homesickness in mercenaries tended to be accompanied by recollections of home as a carefree place where one could enjoy 'neighborly company' along with the simple pleasures in life. Yet upon returning home, mercenaries were often disappointed because it was not a *place* they were longing for. According to Kant, what was felt was indeed a desire for home, but not in a geographical sense. Instead, the nostalgia felt was for the home of one's youth: a temporal home, which could not be brought back. The inability to grasp that which is longed for might be explained with reference to Susan Stewart's suggestion that 'nostalgia is a sadness without an object' (1993, p.23). Inauthenticity is the hallmark of nostalgia in that 'nostalgic reconstruction' can only be achieved through narrative, which, in turn, is always ideological, and divorced from lived experience (Stewart, 1993, p.23). Thus while the phenomenon of nostalgia might be deemed an 'aspect of memory', the former is oft-considered 'antithetical' to the latter (Baccolini, 2007, p.173).

### **Personal Nostalgia**

Thus the home of one's youth represents an enormous resource to be mined for nostalgic reconstruction. The right-hand 'carefree' photograph in 'Heavenly Creatures' plays out several aspects of nostalgia for childhood, as conceptualised by Kant: simple pleasures, companionship and carefree

abandon. Interestingly, the themes involved in longing for one's irretrievable youth chime with Rousseau's (1993 [1762]) Romantic ideal of the nature of childhood. In contemplating a child of ten or twelve years who is 'strong, healthy [and] well-grown for his age' Rousseau suggests that

only pleasant thoughts are called up, whether of the present or the future. I see him keen, eager, and full of life, free from gnawing cares and painful forebodings, absorbed in this present state, and delighting in the fullness of life which seems to extend beyond himself (1993 pp.146-7).

The Romantic child is therefore posited as unencumbered in her/his pursuit of pleasure, as well as being unrestrained by that rationality or responsibility associated with adulthood. Being blissfully unaware of the meaning of habit, routine and custom, the child is shown to be freer than the adult (Rousseau, 1993, p.48). By contrast, in contemplating a grown man, Rousseau suggests pleasure is derived only from imagining his youthful past; the thought of man in the present or future, on the other hand, inspires only thoughts of decay and decline (1993 p.146).

The burden of responsibility and sense of inevitable decline experienced upon entrance to adulthood is reinforced by the pastoral scene in Figure 2, which reminds the viewer of childhood as 'the Edenic state from which adults fall, never to return' (Higonnet, 1998, p.28). Nostalgia for childhood lost, therefore, might be called *personal nostalgia*, and it is through this backward-looking liaison that the reader is permitted to dream and to escape the present (and, incidentally, the future, which inevitably involves decay). Yet, the paradox is that while these images seem to connote a sense of transcendence, or escape, ideologically they also signify immanence via woman as the *eternal child*. This point is nicely illustrated in a passage where Simone de Beauvoir discusses the fate of the adolescent girl:

From this narrow and paltry existence [the adolescent girl] makes her escape in dreams [...] she masks an intimidating universe under poetic clichés, [...] she makes of her body a temple of marble, jasper and mother-of-pearl; she tells herself silly fairy stories. She sinks so often into such foolishness because she has no hold upon the world [...] Magic involves the idea of a passive force; because she is doomed to passivity and yet wants power, the adolescent girl must believe in magic [...] As for the real world, she tries to forget it (1970 [1949], p.81).

Thus for de Beauvoir, woman has no choice but to escape through dreams, fairy tales and magic because the 'real world' is so inhospitable for her. So while the fashion image might beguile in its depiction of dreamy escape to a

carefree time, that escape is via girlhood, which one might argue is regressive and disempowering for adult women. This is particularly true given that childlike femininity holds a repertoire of past significations, which means its representation calls up traditional notions of women as inferior to men (for discussion of resignification and images of women see Gill, 2007; and Macdonald, 1995).

Yet the Romanticism of childhood in comparison to adulthood might not be the only factor informing female fantasies of escape. Drawing on the work of Peter Brown (1986), Efrat Tseëlon (1995, p.13) notes that Eden might also represent virginity: that ‘angelic state [existing] in paradise before the Fall [...] a mediator between the human and the divine’. Referencing virginity – an almost supra-human state – allows fashion, so centrally connected to the fleshly body, to latch on to the essence of the spirit, the mind or the cultural in order to elevate its status, thereby making it more ‘disinterested’ and associated with the mind rather than the body (Barthes, 1990; Bourdieu 1984).

This desire to transcend the fleshly body might be particularly pronounced for women because their bodies have long been mythologised as sprawling and unclean, with ‘uncleanliness [reaching] its height at menstruation’ (Bland, 1981, p.64. See also de Beauvoir, 1970 [1949], pp.50-8; Macdonald, 1995, pp.51-4). Historically, the cleanliness/filth polarity has played into that of the virgin/whore. In the context of the nineteenth century, the ‘dirt’ of female sexuality was displaced onto the cultural figure of the prostitute, leaving middle class women ‘pure’ in their roles as mothers and wives (Bland, 1981, pp.59-60). This binary arguably extended into the twentieth century, albeit in the guise of the monogamous woman versus the promiscuous woman:

The potential labelling of a woman as ‘promiscuous’, ‘filth’, or ‘whore’ and the pressures on women to be *responsible* sexually, have a central place within common-sense thinking, including the way many women and girls think about their own and other women’s sexuality (Bland, 1981, p.64).

That particular ideal of woman as clean and virginal arguably finds expression today in the figure of the woman-child who sits in ‘fashion media discourse’ (Rocamora, 2009) alongside the ‘desiring Postfeminist subject’ (Gill, 2008) and other ideals of femininity. It would be over-simplistic to state that femininity in discourse is polarised between the woman-child and the sexualised ‘Postfeminist’ subject, as there are many shades in between, but nevertheless it seems plausible that the Romantic woman-child might

offer a way out from the 'dirt' and 'too-much-ness' of autonomous female sexuality as traditionally constructed.

Anteriority therefore seems key to reading the image above: it depicts girlhood, a stage of life prior to womanhood, prior to menarche and prior to knowingness and shame. In their simplicity, lightness and proximity to nature, these 'heavenly creatures' reinstate the myth of childhood innocence, positing it as the elusive object of nostalgic contemplation. Indeed, desire for a once-possessioned state might also hark back, albeit unconsciously, to the pre-natal phase where mother and child are unified and pure (see for instance Klein, 1980, pp.176-235):

The nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere...The nostalgic dreams of a moment before knowledge and self-consciousness that itself lives on only in the self-consciousness of the nostalgic narrative (Stewart, 1993, p.23).

Thus whichever phase is longed for – be it pre-natal, infantile, or adolescent – a sense of loss and irretrievability is felt in the intense embrace of 'Heavenly Creatures', where the model constructed as older and more womanly – by virtue of pose, gesture and solemnity – seems deep in reflection, or even in mourning.

Loss and nostalgia might further be explained with reference to the historical centrality of appearance to women's sense of self worth. Wollstonecraft (2004 [1792]) offers an early insight into the double standard of maturation for men and women. Girls, she explains, were understood to reach maturity sooner, at the age of twenty, because 'male prejudice...deems beauty the perfection of woman – mere beauty of features and complexion, the vulgar acceptance of the word' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p.89). By contrast, male beauty was permitted to have some connection with the intellect, and as such full strength and development in men was reached only at the age of thirty. Given that female perfection was premised solely on appearance, ideal selfhood was thereby short-lived and women were 'made ridiculous and useless when the short-lived bloom of beauty [was] over' – a sentiment expressed by a male writer in her day who wondered of what use women 'turned of forty' were to this world (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p.15). If the window of ideal femininity is thus narrowly defined, it is unsurprising that this period of life should subsequently be longed for; anything thereafter would represent a decline from a once-possessioned ideal state.

However, Wollstonecraft was writing in the context of eighteenth century society; does this criterion of ideal selfhood still apply to women several 'waves' later? Discounting tokenistic exceptions for the moment, it



would seem that beauty, as narrowly defined, remains central to successful womanhood as articulated in media discourse (MacDonald, 1995; Wolf, 1991). The difference is that starting in the 1990s, media images became more sophisticated – and difficult to critique – because they incorporated some of the more palatable aspects of feminism into their lexicon, to appeal to more independent, professional women (Gill, 2007, 2011). One example involves the representation of conventionally beautiful women using the tropes of freedom, choice and control. However, too often in the magazine context, ‘in control’ is limited to ‘the right to consume and display oneself to best effect’ rather than empowerment in ‘the worlds of work, politics or even the home’, as pointed out by Imelda Whelehan (2000, p.4). In this sense, media discourse appropriates the rhetoric of ‘second wave’ feminism and represents it in diluted form, dispensing with its more radical content (McRobbie, 2004, p.260). Although there is far more written about beauty, sexuality and ‘postfeminism’, particularly in relation to the concept of irony (see for instance Gill, 2007, 2008, 2011; McRobbie 2004, 2009), it seems fair to note here that while the discursive definition of womanhood has expanded following the gains of feminism, appearance remains central to ideas of successful womanhood and empowerment.

From this, Rosalind Coward’s (1984, p.81) concept of ‘narcissistic damage’ – the uncomfortable interplay of relations between woman, her self-image and the cultural ideals of femininity – has continuing relevance for women today:

Most women know to their cost that appearance is perhaps the crucial way by which men form opinions of women. For that reason, feelings about self-image get mixed up with feelings about security and comfort. Self-image in this society is enmeshed with judgements about desirability. And because desirability has been elevated to being the crucial reason for sexual relations, it sometimes appears to women that the whole possibility of being loved and comforted hangs on how their appearance will be received (Coward, 1984, p.78).

If appearance is so fundamental to women’s sense of self, then it makes sense that women might fantasise about a time – in early adulthood – when their looks more closely approximated societal ideals. Looks in childhood, however, can be understood differently from those in womanhood: nostalgia for childhood might be for a time when looks are thought to hold altogether less importance, and so-called unconditional love could be expected regardless of appearance. Rosalind Gill (2007, pp.84-5) highlights this perception of childhood in her discussion of a Nike advert, which appeared in a number of women’s magazines in 1993. The advert featured a ‘cute pink and white toddler’ alongside the caption ‘When was the last time you felt

really comfortable with your body?’ Gill concludes that ‘the implication [is], of course, that it was sometime before your second birthday!’ Thus, the advert plays on the body consciousness and insecurity felt by women, in comparison to the relative freedom from self-consciousness perceived to exist in early childhood.

The extent to which this utopia of unselfconsciousness is applicable to today’s children is moot, given the ubiquity of media images of desirable women and the apparent early initiation into magazine-reading rituals (see for instance Gilbert, 1998; Walter, 2010, pp.67-83) as well as increased access to popular culture more generally (Giroux, 2000; Higonnet, 1998; Kincaid, 1992; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2004). Furthermore, the idea of unconditional love in childhood eclipses the possibility of childhood trauma and painful experience, which may have subsequently been repressed by the individual (Fass, 2010). But, nevertheless, that does not preclude the possibility of adult women feeling nostalgia for a time they perceive as happier, easier or more stable.

The medium of photography, combined with the ephemerality of fashion, work together particularly well to facilitate personal nostalgia. Both are

poised ambiguously between present and past: the photograph congeals the essence of now while fashion freezes the moment in an eternal gesture of the-only-right-way-to-be. [...] ‘Now is past’ wrote the eighteenth century poet, John Clare, and the ‘now’ of fashion is nostalgia in the making (Wilson, 2003, p.vii).

This desire to stop time, to capture the present within the still frame, harks back to the way Charles Hodgeson – alias, Lewis Carroll – was thought to use photography in the nineteenth century as a ‘medium to hold the little girl as forever young in the looking glass’ (Mavor, 1994, p.174). The efficacy of the medium lies in the way photography presents itself as ‘both “real” and “unreal”’ thereby permitting Carroll ‘to believe in the myth of everlasting flowers, the myth that such girls as Alice Liddell will remain “forever little”’ (Mavor, 1994, p.174). And so the Romantic woman-child of fashion photography finds herself suspended between childhood and adulthood: that ideal state constructed through careful styling, retouching and model selection. The photographic medium, ‘both real and unreal’, allows for the momentary belief in the fiction of agelessness or everlasting beauty: freezing woman’s development in that supposed window of aesthetic perfection - woman’s apogee, as traditionally defined.

## **Collective Nostalgia**

*Collective nostalgia* for the pastoral past is also evoked by the image: pastoral both in the literal sense – that is, denoting a pre-industrial time or rural lifestyle – and the metaphorical sense, as in the innocent femininity of times past. Historically, nostalgia for the pastoral past has been effected through revivals in both dress (Burman Baines, 1981) and painting (Bradley, 1991; Steward, 1995). Laurel Bradley explains that in the nineteenth century, the pastoral woman in revival paintings was contrasted with the ‘new woman’ of society: the latter being tainted by social change leading to the loss of her sweet and pure nature. Nostalgia for the supposedly pastoral eighteenth century therefore represented an escape from the social and economic instability brought about by the industrial revolution, such as changing gender roles, industrialisation, and disease. By the same tack, the scene depicted in ‘Heavenly Creatures’ arguably appeals to collective nostalgia for a pre-technological era when things were more ‘real’ and life was simpler: simplicity including more clearly defined gender roles such as the male/female, public/private divide.

However, the utopian pastoral past, as depicted in painting from the 1780s onwards, neglected the reality of rural experience in which poverty often prevailed (Steward, 1995, p.177). Barbara Burman Baines (1981, p.18) recognises this in her study of rural dress revivals:

As in most revivals of dress, wishful thinking often clouds the original reality, and current tastes modify those of other eras or places; in looking at rural revivals throughout the years, it is as if the countryside has been peopled twice over, once with those who work the land, in the brutish historical truth of short lives, dispossession and Enclosure Acts, sweating summers and frozen winters, and then peopled all over again by fashion with golden lads and lasses, gently swain piping to their flocks in the valleys and contented milkmaids festooned with flowers in never-ending sunshine.

Thus collective nostalgia should be understood as selective in its recollection of the pastoral past. The ‘Heavenly Creatures’ image therefore evokes an abstract longing for a time past without specifying when this time might be or what life was like then. Indeed, this lack of specificity seems fundamental to the workings of nostalgia, as commented upon by photographer Elaine Constantine:

When I put together a fashion story I consciously avoid any props or location details or even, where possible, styling references that situate the pictures in too precise a time. This seems to be the only way of giving my images a feeling of

nostalgia. I think that a lot of people identify with my work for this reason (quoted in Cotton, 2000, p.152).

Thus nostalgia for the past might be appealing in that it signals escape to a time perceived to be more innocent: both in terms of lifestyle and in terms of gender roles.

Significantly, in the American context, Henry Giroux (2000, p.10) points out that the conservative rhetoric of traditional family values posits the stay-at-home mother as the keeper of childhood innocence and, as such, wholly responsible for its preservation:

As public life is once again separated from the domestic sphere, and as the role of women is limited to an idealized notion of maternity, the requirements of motherhood become the defining principle maintaining the notion of childhood innocence. The myth of childhood innocence infantilizes both women and children while it simultaneously reproduces an extreme imbalance of power between adults and children, on one hand, and men and women, on the other.

As Giroux notes, such conservative rhetoric holds that if innocence has been lost then surely feminism is to blame, at least in some measure. The implication of this premise is that innocence might be recovered, at least in part, by a return to traditional gender roles, traditional societal structures and the pastoral past. It is perhaps in this sense that Doane and Hodges (1987, p.xiii) describe nostalgia as a 'frightening anti-feminist impulse'.

And indeed, such nostalgia *is* curious because for women, it seems, there is little to be nostalgic about. Gayle Greene (1991) points out that few women wish to return to the 'good old days' when men were men and women were women, and as such 'knew their place'. To unpack this seeming inconsistency, nostalgia needs to be recognised as a kind of forgetting (Greene, 1991, p.291), which would explain why images of women as childlike, and therefore not fully adult, are able to circulate with little contestation. In the same way that revivals in painting neglected the poverty-stricken reality of rural experience, the Romantic woman-child forgets the reality of woman's condition prior to the gains of second wave feminism. Such nostalgic remembering is not only selective, but also imprecise. Through nostalgia, the images reinvent the eternal child as utopian, and allow women to forget what it means to be denied full adult status. From this, nostalgia, and forgetting, represents a major impediment to social change, as Greene (1991, p.298) elaborates:

One of the most painful facts about the struggle for emancipation is that we have to keep starting it over again. This may be true of any effort at social change:

each generation seems to need to make its own errors, and a kind of collective amnesia wipes out all memory of the struggles of the past.

Remembering is therefore fundamental to the project of feminism, but fashion images, which posit childlike femininity as paradisaical or utopian, do little to aid the collective, or individual, memory.

### **Nostalgia, Utopia, and Imagining the Future**

Fashion images such as those in 'Heavenly Creatures' present pastoral utopia as a return to innocence, and by implication, tradition: both in terms of woman's position prior to feminism, and in terms of one's Edenic childhood lost. Yet, that said, it is worth questioning whether the concept of nostalgia might be more progressively mobilised in the picturing of women. For instance, Baccolini (2007, p.159) points out that the 'never more' of nostalgia is intimately connected to the 'not yet' of utopia: that imagined state where everything is perfect. Considered in this regard, the nostalgia informing utopia might be politically useful for the project of feminism in its capacity to imagine change and a better future. However, I would question fashion's capacity to *critically* imagine utopia, as it would seem that for fashion, the better life is necessarily attainable through consumption. Indeed, the concept 'utopia' has become increasingly present in the commercial imagination with Moylan and Baccolini (2007, p.13) pointing to the presence of companies such as 'Utopia Bank Loans' and 'Utopia Furniture'. And in the fashion context there is Arcadia Group Ltd.: a British fashion conglomerate promising pastoral paradise. So as for nostalgia-inducing fashion images, then, the better life of traditional femininity, or one's lost childhood, is open to be rediscovered through shopping. And of course, fashion has a vested interest in nostalgia because forgetting is so fundamental to fashion's repetition of forms. Whether fashion photography has the capacity to more progressively imagine utopia, through nostalgia, remains to be seen, at least in the context of this doctoral research.

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This volume is the second in a series of edited books, the goal of which is to draw attention to emerging research on fashion. The first volume included chapters developed from the doctoral research of nine other PhD students – five of whom were LCF students and four of whom were students at the Centre for Fashion Studies at Stockholm University. Their research spanned a range of topics: niche fashion magazines, the history of leisurewear, the business strategy of Topshop, the architectural spaces of designers' shops, the discourse of ephemera, queer style and the historical construction of a Swedish fashion identity. Please contact me via e-mail if you would like a copy of that volume: [r.lifter@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:r.lifter@fashion.arts.ac.uk).