

# Time of Beauty, Time of Fear



## The Romantic Legacy in the Literature of Childhood

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*Teletubbies and the Conflict of the Romantic Concept of  
Childhood and the Realities of Postmodern Parenting*

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*Teletubbies* is the popular but controversial television program, developed by the BBC specifically for very young children, which ran from 1997 to 2001, first in England. The program was subsequently introduced a year later on PBS in the United States. This children's television program both reintroduced and questioned some of the basic Romantic notions of childhood in the era of postmodern parenting. While the program has ceased production, *Teletubbies* has achieved an influential and lasting impact on children's television and other forms of children's screen media that are currently being created for very young children. Developed by Anne Wood and Andrew Davenport, *Teletubbies* completed production after 365 episodes in 2001 and was viewed in more than fifty countries. While *Teletubbies* is no longer in production, the children's television program continues to be shown on various cable television channels in the United States, and many of the episodes are available on DVDs or videos.

Designed specifically for toddlers and infants aged two and younger, *Teletubbies* created a firestorm of controversy when it first appeared on PBS in the United States in 1998. In 1999, the Committee of Public Education of the American Academy of Pediatrics issued "Media Education," a policy statement that included the recommendation urging "parents to avoid television viewing for children under the age of 2 years" (341). While

*Teletubbies* was not explicitly mentioned in the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement, which was developed by its Committee on Public Education, it is clear that the popularity of the program, as the first and best-known television program to be designed specifically for very young children to be broadcast in the United States, was one of the chief motivations for the creation of the media education guidelines. Despite the widely publicized American Academy of Pediatrics media guidelines, the success of *Teletubbies* encouraged the development of more, rather than less, television programming for very young viewers and opened media development for other television programs, such as *Blue's Clues*, *Dora the Explorer*, and *Bear in the Big Blue House*, which are all intended for the same demographic. Another well-publicized criticism of *Teletubbies* was raised when Jerry Falwell, then the spokesperson for the conservative Moral Majority, denounced the program in February 1999; he suggested that Tinky Winky, the largest of the Teletubby characters, was a homosexual role model for young children (Samburg).

Despite criticisms from both progressive and conservative perspectives, *Teletubbies* became the first of an increasing number of television programs, DVDs, videos, computer games, and software apps created for very young children. In the Kaiser Family Foundation report *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers* (2003), Victoria Rideout, Elizabeth Vandewater, and Ellen Wartella acknowledged "an explosion in electronic media marketed directly at the very youngest children of our society" that includes "a booming market of videotapes and DVDs aimed at infants one to 18 months, the launching of the first TV show specifically targeting children as young as 12 months" and "computer games and even special keyboard toppers for children as young as nine months old" (2). *Teletubbies* was both a groundbreaking and deeply troubling children's program for many adults since it celebrated a Romantic concept of an innocent childhood while it simultaneously embraced the technological changes of childhood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

As the pioneering television program intended for very young children, *Teletubbies* influenced children's electronic media immensely. *Zero to Six*, which was released two years after the final regular airing of *Teletubbies*, observed that very young children, aged six months to six years, grow up in a world immersed in media. This study, based on random interviews of

1,000 parents and children, reports that according to parents, their children “spend an average of two hours a day with screen media, mostly TV and videos” (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 12). American children spend about the same amount of time watching screen media (one hour and fifty-eight minutes) as do they spend playing outside (two hours and one minute), and three times as much time with screen media as they do reading or being read to (thirty-nine minutes) (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 4). The American Academy of Pediatrics followed up its 1999 “Media Education” guidelines with “Children, Adolescents, and Television” guidelines in 2001 that still included the recommendation discouraging children two years old or younger from watching any television, and added that total media time for children older than two should be limited to one to two hours of quality programming per day (423). In contrast, *Zero to Six* reported what is actually occurring is that “68% of all children under two use screen media (59% watch TV, 42% watch a video or DVD, 5% use a computer and 3% play video games) and these youngsters will spend an average of two hours and five minutes in front of a screen” (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 5). Despite its pastoral appearance and educational content, *Teletubbies* acknowledges a troubling reality about contemporary children’s immersion in media.

There is much to admire and enjoy in *Teletubbies*. Teletubbyland is a comforting pastoral landscape full of scurrying rabbits and talking flowers presided over by a laughing baby sun. The program is positively Wordsworthian in spirit with the innocent Teletubbies playing endlessly in an idealized garden. The opening line of the program, spoken by the unseen adult narrator, announces, “Over the hills and far away, Teletubbies come to play,” which evokes the idealized world of William Blake’s children joyfully playing in gardens. The vibrant and somewhat psychedelic use of color brings to mind Blake’s illuminated books. Iona and Peter Opie, in their introduction to *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951), note that G. K. Chesterton “observed that so simple a line from the nursery as ‘Over the hills and far away’ is one of the most beautiful in all English poetry,” and then adds, “as if in confirmation, Gay, Swift, Burns, Tennyson, Stevenson, and Henley thought well enough of the line to make it their own” (2). The *Teletubbies* creators very consciously established the program within this Romantic tradition. The *Teletubbies* setting of the unspoiled,

idyllic English countryside is reminiscent of the Hundred Acre Wood of A. A. Milne’s *Pooh* books.

The actual filming of *Teletubbies* took place outside of Stratford, England, so it was perhaps closer in feeling to Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden. The magic of the fairies has been replaced by the magic and power of television. Set in a landscape of gently rolling hills, the Teletubbies live in a safe, green world of friendly animals and talking flowers. The program makes a striking contrast to the urban setting of PBS’s *Sesame Street*. It is generally spring and summer in Teletubbyland. Sunny weather is the norm; however, in a few episodes there is just enough rain to create puddles for the Teletubbies to jump in, or on rare occasions, a light dusting of snow to the delight of the characters. Despite its pastoral landscape, the program is rich in technology. The Teletubbies are four multicolored and multicultural creatures that seem to be a fusion of characters from *Barney & Friends* and *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse*.

The four Teletubbies are creatures that resemble life-size stuffed animals but with television sets fixed in their stomachs. Anne Wood has suggested that the Teletubbies were intended to combine the friendliness of a stuffed animal and the technology of a television (“Nine Ways” 4). In contemporary childhood, the television has become the new constant companion that Pooh and the other stuffed animals once were for Christopher Robin. According to *Zero to Six*, nearly all American children (ninety-nine percent) live in a home with a TV set (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 4). Forty-two percent of the parents of children aged six or younger believe that television “mostly helps” children learn (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 8).

Tinky Winky is the largest and the most gentle of the group. He is purple and resembles a younger and friendlier version of Barney, the dinosaur, the central character from *Barney & Friends*, with a triangle antenna affixed to the top of his head. His purple triangle and the magic bag that he frequently carries, which Jerry Falwell called a purse, are the reasons that Tinky Winky was considered a gay character by several commentators. Dipsy is the green Teletubby who often wears his favorite black-and-white top hat. Dipsy also has darker facial features than the other Teletubbies. Laa-Laa is the yellow Teletubby and the most social of the group. She is concerned to know where the others are and is frequently seen playing

with her orange ball. The smallest Teletubby is Po, whose name references Milne's Pooh. Po is red and is the most popular character with young audience members. She is the most independent of the Teletubbies and spends a great deal of time riding around Teletubbyland on her scooter.

A typical episode of *Teletubbies* begins with the bright yellow sun, which features the laughing infant in its center, rising over the lush, green landscape. The laughing baby sun appears to be the benevolent ruler of Teletubbyland and occasionally shows his appreciation and delight at the actions of the Teletubbies by laughing in approval. The camera follows the gently rolling hills full of brightly colored flowers and rabbits as the narrator announces, "Over the hills and far away, Teletubbies come to play." The four cuddly Teletubbies pop out of their futuristic home, the Tubbytronic Superdome, which appears to be part space station and part mother's womb covered in synthetic grass. The Teletubbies cheerfully emerge from a hole in the center of the roof where they dance to the program's theme song, "Teletubbies Say 'Eh-oh!'" "Eh-oh" is Tubby speak for Hello, and the program's theme song introduces the four characters by name, multiple times, as the Teletubbies laugh, dance, and happily bump into one another. The song ends with a big group hug as the four creatures embrace each other, an action that is frequently repeated during the thirty-minute program. The announcer regularly reminds viewers that "The Teletubbies love each other very much." By the theme song's conclusion, the Teletubbies have disappeared into the landscape in a game of hide and seek as the voice trumpets emerge from the ground and ask the viewer, "Where have the Teletubbies gone?" Throughout the program the announcer and the Teletubbies directly address the viewer, encouraging young children to make television an active rather than passive activity. This is followed by a short episode in which the Teletubbies learn through play. The Teletubbies spend a great deal of time in many of the episodes playing with their favorite objects or exploring their environment. The group activity is interrupted when the magic windmill begins to turn and mysteriously summons the Teletubbies to the top of a hill. Then they wait expectantly until one of the characters receives a television transmission that appears on the screen that is implanted in each of their tummies. The other Teletubbies crowd around to watch the "Here and Now" segment of the program that features a child or children participating in a simple activity such as

picking oranges, playing in a wading pool, or helping a parent set up a bicycle. The Teletubbies are so delighted with watching this short television episode that they insist that it be repeated. They shout, "Again, Again," and their request is granted. The live action "Here and Now" segment is then followed by another Teletubby play activity that imitates a portion of the actions that they have just observed being performed by the children in the "Here and Now" segment. There is usually another group dance and a big hug in the second half of the program. At the end of the program, the Teletubbies are reluctant to leave and delay their departure by playing hide and seek with the viewers. But they eventually say their farewells to the viewer and cheerfully return to the Tubbytronic Superdome as the laughing baby sun sets behind the hills of Teletubbyland.

Wood created the Teletubbies to be a combination of the traditional soft toy that a child might cling to for emotional support and the new electronic technology that is a part of their daily environment. Wood explains that by "taking a television—the most magical piece of technology for a child—and putting it on the tummy of a soft toy. We developed the characters from that, creating technological babies, the Teletubbies" ("Nine Ways" 4). So Winnie-the-Pooh + television = Po, or the postmodern Pooh. Frederick Crews has poked fun at the excesses of recent literary theory in his *Postmodern Pooh* (2001), but it turns out Crews wasn't being as ironic as he assumed.

The costumes of the Teletubbies are reminiscent of the psychedelic creatures that populated Sid and Marty Krofft's *H.R. Pufnstuf* and *The Bugaloos*, children's television programs created in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While the Teletubbies live in a rural pastoral landscape, their home is the Tubbytronic Superdome, a futuristic space station in this brave new/old world of children's television. The Teletubbies eat Tubby Custard and Tubby Toast, which they make themselves. Their chief companion is Noo-Noo, an overeager vacuum cleaner.

The popularity of the Teletubbies has only increased its role in the long-running debate about the quality and amount of television that children ought to watch. John Hersey's influential essay "Why Do Students Bog Down on the First R?: A Local Committee Sheds Light on A National Problem: Reading," published in the May 24, 1954, issue of *Life* magazine, criticized the "pallid primers" that were used to teach reading in schools

and is widely credited for encouraging Dr. Seuss to compose *The Cat in the Hat* (1957). But immediately after Hersey made his recommendation one way to improve reading instruction in schools was to have the “insipid illustrations” found in many basic readers replaced by the more lively drawings “of the wonderfully imaginative geniuses among children’s illustrators, Tenniel, Howard Pyle, Dr. Seuss, Walt Disney,” he addressed other and perhaps greater concern: “Television, the enemy” (148). Hers realized as early as 1954 that children’s reading was increasingly competing with other visual media including comics, magazines, radio, and film, but “Above, all, with television” (147). Hersey discovered in 1954 that only fifteen out of 230 fourth grade children in Fairfield, Connecticut, reported not having a television in their homes (147). As noted previously, the number of homes that report owning at least one television in the United States is now ninety-nine percent. Hersey and his committee were appalled to discover that in 1954 children self-reported that they watched on average three hours, eight minutes, twenty-four seconds of television per day (150). So as early as 1954 children were exceeding the amount of television viewing that the American Academy of Pediatrics media guidelines proposed in 2001. Victoria Rideout, Ulla Foehr, and Donald Roberts’s *Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year Olds*, published by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2010, reports that media time for American children has increased to seven and a half hours a day, seven days a week (1). Hersey’s concern with television may account for the absence of a television set in Seuss’s *The Cat in the Hat*. But the lack of a television set would have already been an anomaly in 1957 in the affluent community of Fairfield, Connecticut, and its absence makes the reading of *The Cat in the Hat* by contemporary children confusing. For children that grow up from birth in environments surrounded by a host of electronic entertainment including televisions, VCR/DVD players, computers, xBoxes, Wii, and various handheld computer games, the premise of Sally and her brother spending a rainy afternoon staring forlornly out the window makes Seuss’s picture book almost impossible to comprehend. *Generation M²* is a follow-up report to those published by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 1999 and 2004, which track media use by American children; and its 2010 report noted that the amount of time that children spend with media has increased in every category—television, music, computer, video games, movies—with one exception:

reading. While the amount of time that children watch television per day has increased by thirty-eight minutes to four hours and twenty-nine minutes, the amount of time reading has been reduced to from forty-three to thirty-eight minutes a day (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2). While *The Cat in the Hat* is a beloved picture book for older generations of readers, the text embodies an idealized version of 1950s childhood that doesn’t mesh with the world of contemporary childhood. Most of the toys that the children own in *The Cat in the Hat*, such as a bicycle, a tennis racket, and balls of various sizes, are intended for outdoor activities. According to *Zero to Six*, contemporary children aged six and younger spend as much time with screen media as they do playing outside (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 4). *The Cat in the Hat* evokes a simpler time in American culture—a sort of picture book equivalent of the popular television program *Leave It to Beaver*, which debuted in 1957, the same year that Seuss’s picture book was published—representing childhood before television, telephones, radios, concerns about stranger danger, and, apparently, even before the use of babysitters when mother is away for the day.

One of the chief reasons that Wood and Davenport created *Teletubbies* was their realization that children—including infants, toddlers, and preschool children—live in a rich technological environment, a situation that is confirmed by the Kaiser Family Foundation reports. They recognized that very young children were watching television, but until *Teletubbies* there was little programming created specifically for them. Davenport explained that the function of *Teletubbies* is “to encourage children to become screen literate; it’s going to be a world of screens rather than pages when they grow up” (BBC “*Teletubbies* FAQ” 4). The Kaiser Family Foundation reports on children’s media use, *Zero to Six* and *Generation M²*, only confirm Davenport’s prediction. According to *Generation M²*, “Eight- to eighteen-year-olds spend more time with media than in any other activity besides (maybe) sleeping—an average of more than 7 1/2 hours a day” (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella). Given that children were already watching television, Wood and Davenport concluded it would be more appropriate to have them viewing quality programs that were specifically created for them.

PBS children’s television programs—such as *Sesame Street*, first aired in 1969 and *Barney and Friends*, first aired in 1992—were created for slightly

older children than was *Teletubbies*, but it is certainly true that some elders and infants have watched these PBS programs. These popular children's television programs were constructed to be faster paced in a way that psychologists suggest is inappropriate and confusing for very young children. Virginia Heffernan reported in "Sweeping the Clouds Away," an 18 November 2007 *New York Times Magazine* article, that while the earliest episodes of *Sesame Street* are now available on DVD, Volumes 1 and 2 of *Sesame Street: Old School* (2007) now include the warning: "These early *Sesame Street* episodes are intended for grown-ups, and may not suit the needs of today's preschool child" (63). The closest counterpart for *Teletubbies* is *Blue's Clues*, which was in active production from 1996–2006, although it can still be seen in the United States on Nickelodeon. This children's television program is much slower paced and more repetitive than PBS's *Sesame Street*. Both *Blue's Clues* and *Teletubbies* were created based on research of young children and their television watching behavior that had developed since the debut of *Sesame Street* in 1969. Malcolm Gladwell has contrasted the different educational theories and media designs of *Blue's Clues* and *Sesame Street* in *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000). Gladwell explains the effectiveness of the "stickiness factor" of these programs and how they improve the retention of educational content with very young viewers (91–93). One only has to consider the calm, highly repetitive pacing of *Teletubbies* in contrast to the more frenetic pace of *Sesame Street*, which took its inspiration from television commercials, to realize that these programs were intended for different ages of children. It is the slow pacing and constant use of repetition of *Teletubbies* that makes the program accessible to infants and toddlers but tends to irritate older viewers, especially adults. After viewing the live-action "Come and See" segment that appears on the television sets that are embedded in their stomachs, the *Teletubbies* request to see it, "Again, Again," and this segment is repeated. Much of the dialogue among the *Teletubbies* simply repeats the information that has been provided to the viewer by the narrator. With the success of *Teletubbies* and *Blue's Clues* and the acknowledgement that viewership of the program includes very young children, *Sesame Street* has also modified and slowed down some of its pacing so that it resembles the more deliberate pacing of some of these other children's programs.

Within months of its premiere, *Blue's Clues* became the highest rated show for preschoolers on commercial television (Gladwell 111). Given that *Sesame Street* was aired on PBS and available to anyone owning a television while *Blue's Clues* was aired on Nickelodeon, a cable station with a more limited audience, this success is even more impressive. It does seem as if PBS was searching for a preschool program that could become the PBS equivalent of Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*, when they found BBC's *Teletubbies*. The "Educational Philosophy" for *Teletubbies* on the PBSKids.org website suggests to parents that "*Teletubbies* provides a new generation of television viewers—the youngest and most impressionable—with the opportunity to feel safe in and enjoy the ever-changing world" (4).

*Teletubbyland* is an adult-free zone where the *Teletubbies* interact with their viewers, in much the same way that Steve or Joe, the calm narrators of *Blue's Clues*, speak directly to the viewer. But in *Teletubbies*, it is a child figure speaking directly to a child viewer, as is the case with *Dora the Explorer*. Building on the research involving young children and their television-watching behavior, these programs strive to make television watching a highly interactive experience. The language that the *Teletubbies* use to converse with one another and address the viewer is a sort of toddler talk, so that Po's scooter is often pronounced "cooter." Davenport, a linguist, developed the scripts for the program and created the Tubby language to duplicate the speaking efforts of a one-year-old—designed to aid children's speech development. Despite the concerns of some parents that the program's language might encourage young viewers to mispronounce words, only fifteen percent of the dialogue is presented in Tubby speak, while the majority of the program is spoken in standard English by way of voiceovers and the "Come and See" segments.

But the process of watching television is at the heart, or more accurately, at the tummy of *Teletubbies*, which is the center of any infant's universe. As the title of the television program makes explicit, each of the *Teletubbies* has a television screen implanted in its stomach. Watching television has become as natural as eating and sleeping for children. The aspect most difficult for adults to stomach is that in each episode of the program the *Teletubbies* gather as a group at the top of a hill and wait expectantly for one of them to receive a television transmission to be played on one of their

screens. In a self-referential move, the child viewer watches the Teletubbies, as the characters watch television. The Teletubbies model television-watching behavior, which clearly brings them great pleasure, and becomes the prompt for their subsequent play. The Teletubbies view live-action "Come and See" segments narrated by young children. Judith Williamson has argued that Teletubbies celebrates and denaturalizes the conventions of television for children, enabling even toddlers to experience themselves as viewers (Margaronis 34). While one of the key elements of *Barney and Friends* is singing, the most important elements of Teletubbies are simple physical actions and movements as the characters learn through play. Much of the program is focused on walking and exploring as the Teletubbies learn to navigate their magical world.

Wood, who had previously produced other successful BBC preschool children's programs including *Tots TV* and *Rosie and Jim*, explains that "The Teletubbies live in the land where television comes from, in the land of childhood, in the land of nursery rhymes" ("Nine Ways" 5). Teletubbies bridges the traditional concept of childhood, where a parent might lull an infant to sleep with a lullaby or where children entertain themselves with a jump rope rhyme, to the postmodern world, where children entertain themselves by watching television. Television has become such an integral part of postmodern childhood that it is now on equal footing with picture books and stuffed animals. The PBS Teletubbies website features a "PBS Parents FAQ" and its first question is, "Don't the television sets in the Teletubbies tummies promote television viewing?" The PBS response is, "Television is part of our daily culture, and serves as a window to the world for many families and young children" and add that ninety-nine percent of U.S. homes have a television set ("PBS Parents FAQ" 1). Given this media-rich environment, Wood maintains that very young children, even infants, are shaped by this media revolution that is symptomatic of postmodern culture. Gil Scott-Heron famously announced, "The revolution will not be televised," in the song of the same name on his 1970 album *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox* (Scott-Heron). But when it comes to children's culture, the revolution is television. According to *Zero to Six*, "59% of all children under two watch TV every day" (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 5). The same study reports that seventy-four percent of all infants and toddlers have watched TV before the age of two (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella 5).

So the least fantastical aspect of Teletubbies turns out to be when the characters watch television. Just as the Romantic Era experienced the increasing transformation of children's culture from oral to print, postmodern culture is beginning to experience the gradual transformation of children's print culture to screen culture.

Teletubbies is the literal embodiment of Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) that, "the medium is the message" (7). The primary message of this educational children's television program is that the watching of television has become so internalized that it has become a natural function akin to eating, speaking, or sleeping for toddlers. Technology is rapidly transforming American childhood. Teletubbies more accurately reflects the lives of most American children than the television-free world of *The Cat in the Hat*. Television has become an essential aspect of postmodern childhood along with playing with stuffed animals or reading picture books. The various Kaiser Family Foundation reports suggest that television and other screen media are beginning to play a far more significant role in postmodern childhood than reading print texts. While this may be unsettling for adults who came of age in a primarily print culture, it also argues for the increased development of carefully designed educational television programs for young children, such as Teletubbies.

Douglas Rushkoff in *Playing the Future: How Kids' Culture Can Teach Us to Thrive in an Age of Chaos* (1996) goes one step further and argues that adults who wish to adapt to the contemporary cyberculture would do well to take their cues from children's television programs and video games. Teletubbies was one of the first children's programs to prominently feature the program's website, which was intended for both children and adults, at the conclusion of each episode. It is increasingly common for children's television programs, children's authors, and individual children's books to feature a website. Rushkoff argues that both children and adults need to accept technological change as a constant and that adults need to model themselves after contemporary "screenagers," those children "born into culture mediated by television and computers" (3). Perhaps a good first step for very young children to help them and their parents enter into this world of new media might be watching Teletubbies. Maria Margaronis in *The Nation* has noted that Teletubbies is "indeed radically child-centered" in

that it “neither patronizes children like Barney & Friends nor tries to amuse their parents like Sesame Street” and that “there is no didactic, adult bottom line” (3).

Yet the creation of a television program whose primary audience is composed of children two years old and younger is deeply troubling to many adults, especially parents. Rather than mandating no television for very young children, perhaps it would be more realistic to recommend limited viewing to age-appropriate or content-appropriate television programs. The American Academy of Pediatrics media guidelines recommend avoiding the use of any screen media, including television, as an electronic babysitter, and the co-viewing by an adult and discussing the content of children’s television programs with the child (“Media Education” 341). Laudable concepts, but difficult to achieve in the context of postmodern parenting. The recommendation that parents should limit the amount of television viewing by children to two hours a day of quality programming is even less than the amount reported by John Hersey in 1954. The American Academy of Pediatrics media guidelines reflect an elitist bias since many contemporary families lack a stay-at-home parent or do not employ a full-time daycare provider to monitor television usage of children. Television as a form of an electronic babysitter is an extremely tempting option for many busy parents. Given the rise of dual working-parent and single-parent families, this appeal has only increased since the initial airing of *Teletubbies* in 1998.

Gina Kolata has reported in “Muddling Fact and Fiction and Policy,” in the 8 August 1999 issue of the *New York Times*, that neuroscientists have dismissed the American Academy of Pediatrics position that television should be discouraged. However, there seems to be no research to support the American Academy of Pediatrics claims. Dr. Marjorie Hogan, the chief author of the American Academy of Pediatrics report, acknowledged that there are “no studies with young children showing actual brain changes occurring with television viewing,” and that the American Academy of Pediatrics “extrapolated” from other research to “infer that children’s brains are harmed when they spend their time gazing at television screens instead of interacting with humans” (Kolata 5). A similar misguided extrapolation is the so-called “Mozart Effect,” a test done on college students, which showed that they performed slightly better on tests after listening to ten

minutes of Mozart. John Bruer, in *The Myth of the First Three Years: A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning* (1998), has shown that the “Mozart Effect” evolved into the popular but mistaken notion that playing Mozart, and by extension any sort of classical music, will make young children smarter (200–01). Pediatricians are not trained as media specialists, although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that “pediatricians should begin incorporating questions about media use into their routine” (“Media Education” 341). The American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines seem to promote a more Romantic concept of childhood than the one that is being articulated on *Teletubbies*. The very young children who are not supposed to watch any television at all are actually exceeding the daily recommendation of television viewing proposed for older children. PBS officials argue that since children under two are watching television, it is better to have them watch quality programming, like *Teletubbies*, created specifically to encourage these very young children to learn. Yet organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics insist:

Although certain television programs may be promoted to this age group, research on early brain development shows that babies and toddlers have critical need for direct interaction with parents and other significant care givers (eg, child care providers) for healthy brain growth and the developments of appropriate social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Therefore, exposing such young children to television programs should be discouraged. (“Media Education” 341)

So which side of this ongoing debate promotes the Romantic concept of children? *Teletubbies* seems to offer a utopian world of childhood that encourages cooperation, independence, individuality, and creativity for very young children. Under the protective eyes of the laughing baby sun, *Teletubbies* celebrates the innocence of young children joyfully playing in an idealistic postmodern garden. Critics insist that television is the dangerous serpent that lurks in the garden. Leo Marx has noted in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) that American writers have long recognized “the contradiction between the rural myth and the technological fact” (354). While *Teletubbies* has the appearance of a pastoral landscape, it is a carefully designed television program intended to introduce very young viewers to the world of technology within this

world of unspoiled nature. Children's television and its growing brood of vipers of other forms of screen media have made a permanent home in the contemporary garden of childhood, and to many adults these seem to threaten the health and safety of children. Others view television programs such as *Teletubbies* and other screen media as simply a new form of technology that can effectively be used to entertain and educate even very young children. Clearly *Teletubbies* has begun the process of creating screen media for very young children, and how such media will influence young children is still very open to debate. This groundbreaking program, and subsequent television programs created for toddlers and infants that it has inspired have destabilized previous notions of children and childhood and reaffirm that childhood is very much a social construct that is profoundly influenced by changes in technology. Parents and children are encouraged to enter this ambiguous postmodern garden of childhood at their own risk.

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