

Peggy Somerville

An e-mail conversation between Hayley Field and John Somerville, Peggy's nephew:

HF: I am intrigued to know about how Peggy felt about her early career. I can't imagine what it must have been like for her to be acclaimed at such an early age. The painting (Tree and castle) has a dreamscape quality about it I find fascinating - her later work feels much more rooted in the real world - would you say that is true or did she maintain an element of invention?

JS: Peggy was an altogether EXCEPTIONAL person and from what she and my Father told me about her childhood, she was equally so when a girl.

As all the siblings painted and drew, her and my father's 'brilliance' did not SO stand out. Also she had very enlightened parents who were not willing to allow or let fame go to her head and would have played down the press seeking her out and probably didn't show her all the press coverage - though they kept a scrap book which is at the Norwich Museum if you care to see it. It was all rather made light of and Peggy herself was the most UN self centred or big headed child who just LOVED what she loved doing most which was to look at nature and draw and paint - and she cared almost as much about her cats and all the farm animals around her. Her earliest workings are particularly 'fantastical' as all infant work is but hers was just astoundingly competent.

As she grew and progressed then she began to depict more of 'the real world' around her. In her mature and adult work she painted what she saw and had her feet firmly on the ground and rooted in reality - but it always had a 'feminine' quality (no offence intended!) which I describe as a 'poetical quality'. After infancy she almost never painted 'imaginative' subjects or works. Interestingly though, at the end of her life when she was so ill and certainly knew she was or might be dying, that soft and dreamlike quality comes back into her work.

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