

BREATHING SPACE:
INFANCY AND AESTHETICS IN 19-CENTURY
BRITISH POETRY AND POETICS

by

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Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the intersperséd vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought !
(“Frost at Midnight” S. T. Coleridge)

And let the ladies sing us, if they will,
From time to time, some ballad or a song
To give us breathing space
(prologue to *The Princess* Tennyson)

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For Ella and Bruno, whose late night breathing as infants filled up the space around me, and who continue to inspire and teach me.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the concept of infancy in nineteenth-century British poetry and poetics. Usually read as symptomatic of sentimental ideology, infancy in romantic and Victorian era poetry in fact offers a radical critique of poetic/philosophical/cultural narratives of progress and normativity. My dissertation reveals the ways in which spatial and temporal disturbances associated with the space of infancy and often signaled by formal breaks within the poem suggest a more radical aesthetic and ontology of the subject. These revisions further suggest an alternative model for reading centered on an ethical awareness of immediate environments.

Chapter one builds a reception history of William Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," examining the disparate ways in which Wordsworth's concepts of immortality and infancy were received by Mathew Arnold and J. S. Mill and suggesting a poetics at work in the poem that is positional and fluid rather than hierarchical and fixed. Chapter two considers the poetry and prose of Erasmus Darwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and argues for two competing aesthetic theories, corresponding roughly to organic form and symbolization, arising from prose descriptions of the baby at the mother's breast. Chapter three uses original archival research—readings of poems, letters, journals, and essays—to examine Sara Coleridge's fall into and emergence from a period of post-partum depression, an experience I read as a spiritual and aesthetic experience rather than merely psychological and medical. My final chapter focuses on Alfred Tennyson's stillborn poetics, that is, his desire to have his poems *be* in the world but not to circulate, a dilemma that he partially resolves through a formal engagement with ballad measure.

Breathing Space contributes to studies of the child, focusing on infancy as a concept rather than a field of representation. It engages with debates within Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge studies, as well as within the studies of romanticism and Victorian literature. Certain psychoanalytic terms and concepts are applied in order to perform a reciprocal critique—poetry to theory and vice versa. Finally, *Breathing Space* contributes to the study of poetry and poetics more generally, proposing a model of reverberative reading that moves beyond reader-response critique.

Chapter 1

Introduction:

Part 1: Separation

My dissertation examines the tangled relationship between representations of human infancy in nineteenth-century British poetry and poetics and the burgeoning discourses of aesthetics, philosophy, and psychology in the first half of that century. It does not do so systematically. Instead, I engage a handful of texts and derive from them a theory of infancy and poetics. Along the way I also articulate something like a theory of reading. Specifically, I address the *space* of infancy—usually construed as the space of an immediate (and isolated) connection to nature, poetic inspiration, and bodily pleasure—and inquire how this space might also be read as a model for ethical and affective connection. The resistance to such a reading lies in the now commonplace critical conflation of representations of poetic infancy with sentimentality rather than sensibility, isolation rather than intimacy, and autogenesis rather than inter-connectedness.

There have been, in the last fifty years, several critical studies examining the relation between poetry and childhood.¹ The studies that focus most specifically on romantic-era writing (Coveney and Plotz) tend to read the child-poet relation (either critically or favorably) as reflecting such concepts as “freshness of sensation” and “the disordering of the senses”—both elucidated in M. H. Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism*. (Abrams 131) Other recent studies (Steedman; Kincaid) engage

with the figure of the child at the point at which it intersects with certain poststructuralist assumptions about the impossibility of immediate experience, a critique of origins, the “linguistic turn,” etc.² Even though the authors may be on opposite sides of the critical fence, the juxtaposition of the poetic child and poststructuralist critiques of individualist subjectivity leads these studies to a position most closely associated with Paul de Man’s opposition of allegory and symbol: that is, Carolyn Steedman, perhaps because she is an historian, reads the child as a symbolic figure, separable from our desires, if, and only if, we can interrogate the constructedness of that figure, and if we are willing to see our own complicity in its reification; for James Kincaid, on the other hand, the child simply *is* our desire, whether we concede our attraction/identification or not. I read Kincaid as suggesting, along with David Simpson, that the poetic child functions as the ultimate romantic ironist. That is, the ironic poet or child is able to turn every reading into its opposite.³

Breathing Space: Aesthetics and Infancy in nineteenth-century British Poetry and Poetics builds on these important ideas and readings, but it also takes a critical distance from them. It focuses not on representations of infants per se, but rather on the formal, psychological, and phenomenological effects of infancy in poems in the period. Specifically, the moments or intervals that I am interested in exploring are poetic and critical passages, engagements with infancy, in which time seems to run differently—it either speeds up or slows down. One such moment happens famously in a text by S. T. Coleridge that I use as one of my epigraphs for this dissertation:

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the intersperséd vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought !

What, besides breath, is contained in those pauses? And why is it only momentary? Memory, hope, futurity, interruption, sympathy—all of these temporalizations surround our encounters with infants, whether represented in poems or encountered in our daily lives. As “Frost at Midnight’s” cramped interiors and “pent” cities demonstrate, this temporalization is also a spatial phenomenon. It is doubly so insofar as in poetry to talk about temporalization is also always to talk about tempo: form and meter, words arranged spatially on a page. Thus, while I refer to “space,” what I really have in mind is a spatialized temporality, that is, moments of subjective experience that *feel* more objective, strange, disorienting, unstable. I explain this in more detail below.

For now, suffice it to say that the space of infancy, in the sense I use it, is an intimate space, one that is analogous to the space of reading, writing, reflection, and (this is the important part) human inter-connectedness.⁴ Of course the identification of infancy with a preverbal space of “oneness” tends to obscure the potential for examining the social dimension of infancy, that is, the ideological construction of the *idea* of infancy. Representations and explications of this subtraction to oneness produce either idealistic wishes to return, arguments for or against its continuation or loss, or critiques of the ideological consequences / determinations of such an idea, etc. My dissertation on the other hand is interested in what it means that we continue to imagine and yearn for such oneness,⁵ even after we know, or *think* we know, that our sense of separateness is essential to who we are, and that we can find *moments* in which we *feel* more “one” with others or the world, but that they are only that:

intimations, gaps, spaces in-between, intersperséd vacancies and momentary pauses of the thought.

Breathing Space then is about the contradictory yet often simultaneous desires for separation and unification. One separation that I feel I must speak to openly and up-front is the separation between poetry and theory, that is, the separate space they occupy in this dissertation. While the impulse to theorize comes out of a deep interest in and engagement with the poetry, there are times when it seems as though my dissertation is more about psychoanalytic theory than about poems. While I regret this somewhat, I do not believe it could have been otherwise. Hopefully, it will become clear that I read psychoanalytic texts as always already in dialogue with the processes, forms, and concerns of poetry – and vice versa. And yet I confess that the two discourses, not to mention their historical distances, seem at times unwilling to congeal. This is, to my mind, the methodological corollary to the aforementioned problem of seemingly antithetical desires; that is, my dissertation seeks to engage its objects with critical intimacy *and* critical distance.

The question naturally arises then, how does the space of infancy help to articulate these problems and what solutions does it offer? Similarly, what *is* a child in this sense; or again, what is infancy? Infancy, according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, was the first stage of the child's life and ended at 5 years old. Extending this state and focusing it on language, Phillipe Aries locates, in a medieval text on the "ages of life" the following: "The first age is childhood when the teeth are planted, and this age begins when the child is born and lasts until seven, and in this age that which is born is called an infant, which is as good as saying not talking, because in this age it

cannot talk well or form its words perfectly, for its teeth are not yet well arranged or firmly implanted...” (21). This schema, put forward in *Centuries of Childhood*, suggests that the transition from infancy to the next stage (*pueritia*) is predicated not so much on language acquisition, as on verbal mastery. It seems to me important that the focus here is on language and mastery. For certain studies, Kincaid’s *Child Loving* for example, a child is whatever we say a child is, from babbling infants to marriageable young women unwilling to yield to their family’s choice of suitor (that is to say, unable to speak for themselves). It follows then that any group that is patronized or infantilized might be commonly identified as or as *like* children. As Sally Shuttleworth writes, “the figure of the child...lies at the heart of nineteenth-century discourses of gender, race and selfhood” (87). Importantly for this study, I regard infancy as a state that is pre-lingual, or perhaps pre-symbolic, but not pre-perceptual or pre-rational. As commentators as chronologically and ideologically diverse as Rousseau, S. T. Coleridge, D. W. Winnicott and Daniel Stern have suggested, there are forms of communication and inter-connectedness evident long before the child utters its so-called first word. This is important because these forms of bodily and extra-linguistic language allow us to return a lost valence to the discourse of aesthetics, namely, sensation or affect.⁶

To the degree that this dissertation is a rallying cry for poetry or the aesthetic, it further proposes that we reconnecting affect, folding in the recent interest in affect studies, to theories of the aesthetic.⁷ Generally, in the works that I consider, the infant is corporeal to the core, often threateningly so. Theorists have long argued, and continue to argue, that there may be a logic of *feeling* at work (or play) in

infancy, which helps to explain its fascination to poets and philosophers attempting to escape the rigid rationalism of the enlightenment. Romantic era poets not only attempted to locate non-rational logics in nature, they also focused on infants. The problem of separation then becomes a problem of interpretation (exactly what *does* the infant think or feel or desire?), which becomes also one of translation (what can the poet or scientist learn from the infant?).

I turn then to a poem that I believe illustrates or performs these problems beautifully. Not surprisingly, it is one of William Blake's, a song of innocence, which seems so clear on the surface (like Blake's own water before it has been "stained clean"), but has in fact perplexed critics since its first publication. I offer it here not merely because it so vividly marks, in its own bizarre fashion, all of the levels at which the separation of breathing space obtains—imaginary from symbolic (Chapter 2); aesthetic object from human subject (Chapter 3); self from internalized other (Chapter 4); poet from poem and prosodic form from its conventional setting (Chapter 5)—but also because recent criticism has seized on it as exemplary of often opposing and irreconcilable concerns and claims.

I have no name
I am but two days old.—
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name,—
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old.
Sweet joy I call thee:
Thou dost smile.
I sing the while
Sweet joy befall thee.

Rather than present a reading of the poem, I offer here three readings of three *readings* of the poem. My hope is that these readings will help to demonstrate what is at stake in a study of infancy and aesthetics, especially for our current critical moment.

My first reading is illustrative of a kind of critical distrust, in which the infant's entrance into language necessarily denotes a fall from grace. It is perhaps the darkest view of this poem, at least from the standpoint of what other critics see as its liberatory potential. Harriet Guest and John Barrell (1988) make what is essentially a narratological argument: any attempt to describe or account for innocence must come from a position of experience. Thus the poem describes not only a fatal fall, but an inevitable one.⁸ We see how the space of the child, *enfans* (without language), provides critics with rich material with which to illustrate the effects of the linguistic turn. For Guest and Barrell, the moral dilemma of this fall into language puts them, as "experienced" critics, at risk of doing violence to the text by simply commenting on it:

...any reading at all will therefore violate whatever innocence the poems might be imagined to express or address. It is for reasons of this nature that we have felt obliged up to this point to write about what the words and images *may* say or what *perhaps* they indicate.
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Granted, this is an extreme critical stance, and luckily, not one that they uphold throughout the essay. The point is simply that infancy, innocence, immortality—as concepts—generally either don't get taken seriously, or else they place the critic in a strange double bind, a kind of ethical critical paralysis.

My second citation of “Infant Joy” comes from Camille Paglia’s *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990). Paglia’s impressionistic and high-octane reading at times seems on the verge of toppling over: “‘Infant Joy’ is a Rousseauist vacuum into which Sadean nature is about to rush.” Yet she recognizes several important factors in the poem (does her essayistic style allow her a certain angle of vision denied to contemporary literary critics?). For example, she captures the *space* of the poem as no other reading to my knowledge has: “‘Infant Joy’ removes the buffering between person and beings... [it] has the moral emptiness of...a space cleared in nature” (273, 4).

I would accede to “moral emptiness,” but with the stipulation that another distinct “morality” organizes the poem. It is a bodily and intimate responsiveness. Paglia wants to insist that it is a sadistic morality, and again, I would agree only so far. The lines “Thou dost smile. / I sing the while” suggest only a difference of perspective, modality, and relation to the symbolic register—not, as Paglia suggests, rape. Yet again, she notices several important features, which hone in on the importance of infancy as a concept—not merely of innocence in sexual sense but of innocence as regarding ignorance. For example, she gestures toward the infant’s affective, pre-rational state: “The infant is blind. But we aggressively see” (275). Chapter 2 of my dissertation focuses on this difference, specifically the challenge that infancy poses to our enlightenment privileging of the faculty of sight—that is, our devaluation of affect as a means of epistemology.

Surprisingly, after citing both stanzas in full, she never quotes the poem or reads it closely. Instead she focuses on the “feeling” of the poem and its visual

representation in the Blake's accompanying plate. Paglia's reading of Blake's etching connects the "powerlessness" of the infant to "the womblike...surgical opening up of a female body, nature's organic machine" (276). It seems necessary to bracket Paglia's enthusiastic and impressionistic imagery and rhetoric in order to see her more salient claims about the embedded sadism in representations of infancy. It is amazing in fact, at the risk of a bad pun, how fertile this poem is for Paglia. It organizes nearly all of her generalizations about Blake's presentation of infancy.

More recently, Isobel Armstrong in *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000) follows a brief, almost telegraphic primer on D. W. Winnicott's transitional object with a reading of "Infant Joy." Her reading celebrates the "emancipatory aesthetic" that Blake makes visible in *Songs of Innocence*. She reads the poem's slippage from state to name—joy in either case—as "causing a lesion...the first intimations of metaphor" (43). That Armstrong falls back on, or looks forward to, Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" is telling. For Armstrong cannot help but read the poem, and here is where Winnicott figures, as a transition. But Wordsworth clearly sees the "first intimations of metaphor" as being synonymous with the "prison house shades." In other words, the story of a child's introduction into culture and society is yet another version of the fall. Unlike Guest and Barrell, Armstrong does not see this transition as tragic. She inventively reads the vertical columned repetitions of the letter "o" in the second stanza as both Nietzschean symbols of eternal return and as zeros—"indivisible continuities and blanks." This ambiguity, as well as, one must suppose (because Armstrong moves so quickly in this reading it falls to the reader to fill in the blanks), the intimate and loving language of the poem, leads Armstrong to her strongest

claims for the poem, namely that “Separation happens without phallic violence; it is *space* which orders separation: and creates transitional ambiguities” (43). It will not surprise the reader that I am partial to this reading. Yet I am not certain how an alternative aesthetic, radical or otherwise, derives from this reading. It seems of a piece with the larger body of Armstrong’s work—perceptive, convincing, original, and utopian.

It seems important to consider why Armstrong, in a book that is meant to mount a rear-guard action against post-structuralist and new-historical attacks on the aesthetic, stages readings of both “Infant Sorrow” and “Infant Joy.” How does infancy redeem the aesthetic without lapsing into Schillerian idealism? One partial answer and one that Armstrong does not state explicitly but I will is that considering the *space of infancy* returns to the word aesthetic its other definition: that is, sensation or affect. For Armstrong, object relations theory opens a way of construing affect *as* thought—in her, again, intensely compressed reading of “Tintern Abbey” she describes feeling as “the limit case of thought in erasure” (101).

The three readings that I have put forward here emblemize three possible approaches to critical engagement with poems: Guest and Barrell’s might be described as a linguistically phobic literalist reading; Paglia’s is an ironic reading, one that pushes against a sadistic and misogynous culture; Armstrong’s represents what might be called a kind of neo-formalist aestheticism. My own way to approach this material is to acknowledge that infancy, innocence, immortality, *and the aesthetic* are concepts. They are, in other words, ideological, historically contingent, and habitual. As such, there is a danger in taking them too seriously. There is also, I believe, an

opposing danger, that is, of not taking them seriously enough. I hope in this dissertation to find some breathing space between intuition (poem as innocence) and concept (poem as experience), or, perhaps more precisely, between reading the poem as an expression of self evident truth, and reading the poem as repression.

Chapter 1 is my longest and most theoretical chapter. It deals with Matthew Arnold's and J. S. Mill's reception of William Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode." Aside from the Ode's own claims to a kind of presentation of the child ("Thou best philosopher"), I'm interested in its oft-cited *failure to synthesize child* and man, past and present, despite its odal (i.e. dialectical) structure. I argue that it is the child, or more precisely the space of the child (Wordsworth's calls it immortality)—irreducible and mobile—which finally refuses synthesis or resolution in the poem. The best philosopher then, the six-years darling, becomes an unstable figure or a form, one which gets refigured or reformed, troped, embraced, and rejected throughout the nineteenth century.

What nearly everyone in the mid-to-latter part of the century could agree upon is that the Ode's concept of immortality—that is, its suggestion of a semi-Platonic realm accessible to us as infants and then forgotten—was "bad philosophy." But like the proverbial bad penny, it was a philosophical idea that would not go away. In fact, although he led the campaign to focus on the poetic rather than the philosophical aspects of Wordsworth, Arnold's overt skepticism about immortality in his criticism gives way to ambivalence about it in his poetry. In fact, Arnold's inability to decide results in several darker, more disturbing poetic representations of infancy and poetic origin, several of which I treat in Chapter 1. Mill, on the other hand, somewhat

embarrassedly embraces Wordsworth's Ode as medicine, a balm for an over-intellectualized youth.

Using concepts drawn from object relations and recent philosophical work on language and infancy by Julia Kristeva and Giorgio Agamben, I suggest that both Arnold and Mill fail to recognize the ways in which the Ode's concept of immortality, sketched in more detail in Wordsworth's first "Essay upon Epitaphs," refigures infancy as a spatial rather than temporal dimension. This allows for movement between remembered, imagined, and perceived states of feeling: "Hence, in a season of calm weather / Though inland far we be, / Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea." The resulting mobility resembles Melanie Klein's concept of "position," a re-conception of Freud's more circumscribed and fixed concept of oral, anal, and genital stages. When this poetic / theoretical formulation is returned to the Ode's original context within nineteenth-century debates about development, progress, and *Bildung*, we glimpse a radical poetics of immortality and infancy, one which shifts from the temporal interiorized realm of the subject to spatial exteriorized realm of the social.⁹

Chapter 2 moves from epistemology to aesthetics. Here, in prose works by Erasmus Darwin and S. T. Coleridge, observation of infants at the mother's breast produces competing aesthetic theories. Roughly speaking, these theories correspond to Darwin's organicism and Coleridge's theory of the symbol. Yet I attempt to return these scenes in their intimate contexts, that is, babies in a nearly undifferentiated connection to their mothers, in order to grasp the affective and psychic processes that underwrite our theories of the aesthetic. Perhaps not surprisingly, two different

versions of alienation emerge. Darwin suggests that as adults we long to put art objects into our mouths—a literalization of the analogy between objects of beauty and the mother’s body. I call this an incorporative aesthetics. Coleridge, on the other hand, reads the mother’s distraction, her turn away from the infant, as the moment of the child’s first thought. The mother, turns toward God or toward the father—Coleridge designates this difference as form and shape respectively. The child must interpret the meaning of this turn away. Coleridge suggests that at this very moment, the problem—that is what the mother turns toward—becomes the solution. This I call an introjective aesthetics.¹⁰

Having teased out these two aesthetic theories I test them against the poetics of Darwin and Coleridge and find, especially in the case of Coleridge, an antithetical current running underneath. There is a sense of ambivalence in many of Coleridge’s poems about introjecting objects precisely because of the danger introjection poses to his autonomy. I read this ambivalence as corresponding to recent revaluations of the ethical implications of Coleridge’s thought and poetics, in which his “dissatisfaction” and sense of “limbo” are refigured as ethical engagements rather than retreats. Coleridge’s difficulty at the end of Chapter 2 concerns his infant son Hartley; can he accept the role of father without somehow losing his own autonomy or robbing Hartley of his? I conclude the chapter by suggesting that although it may be impossible, and undesirable, to keep objects outside of us, there is a value in holding the object—aesthetic, imagined, human—outside of us for as long as possible, so that we may know, at least temporarily, where we end and someone or thing else begins.

The epistemic and aesthetic space of infancy explored in Chapters 1 and 2 of my dissertation is refigured in Chapter 3 as a potentially ethical space. In this chapter I consider the problem of merging identities from the perspective of S. T. Coleridge's daughter Sara. An accomplished poet in her own right, Sara Coleridge struggled to maintain her identity in the years immediately following the birth of her two surviving children. Diagnosed with a nervous disorder—the name at the time was puerperal insanity—Coleridge kept a journal of her children's early years. This unpublished document is a fascinating study of emersion and ultimate emergence. Because she conceives of infancy and invalidism as related states in which the bodily or animal side of one's nature is in contestation with one's reason, Coleridge uses the journal as a space to document the bodily processes of both the children's and her own slow journey's from partial animality to human subjectivity. Sara Coleridge finds a right relation to her children as well as to the animality of her own body only by subjecting herself to what I call extended asceticism.

Briefly, extended asceticism requires entering into the realm of the social even or especially when that engagement is painful. In an unpublished essay on asceticism Coleridge contrasts extended asceticism with formal asceticism. Formal asceticism retreats from the world. In contrast, extended asceticism requires an acknowledgement of human imperfection and imperfectability even as it requires a movement toward that impossibility. To the degree that Coleridge actually emerges from her experience of merging with her infant children, she does so with an understanding of and appreciation for intense demands of the body. Bodies matter in

Coleridge not so much because they block the way to perfection but rather because they register pleasure and pain, that is, they extend into the world, they exist in space.

Just as a birth is the extension of a being into the realm of the social, which, by Coleridge's definition, is the realm of pleasure, pain, and imperfect striving, so too Coleridge's reemergence from her intense identification with her infant children constitutes a kind of birth. It is of course a textual birth. Her poems, especially her *Pretty Lessons for Children in Verse*, document her difficult and confused merging at the same time as they register her investment in extended engagement with the world, a world made dangerous and strange and beautiful by our inescapable embodiment.

Having touched on the epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics of infancy, Chapter 4 engages something like an arrested ontology of infancy, that is, the advantages of imaging poems as being born already dead. In considering two minor poems written at either end of a ten year span in the career of Alfred Tennyson, I tease out what I term a stillborn poetics. Tennyson, like many poets, uses the language of parturiency when discussing his poems, which is to say, he writes of his poems as his children. This extended metaphor, in which the figure of the mother is appropriated by the poet, and in which discursive births replace fleshly ones, is used by Tennyson to express his doubts and anxieties about publishing his poetry and having it subject to harsh critique.

I argue that Tennyson's working through of his anxiety about poetic circulation culminates with the stillbirth of his first son. The description of his "little warrior," or stillborn son was recapitulated by Tennyson in over sixty letters and it recurs as a motif in several of his poems. Stillborn poetics allows for qualities and

potentials to be locked up inside the object and preserved. Tennyson writes that his stillborn son was “the grandest-looking child [he] had ever seen.” It is important to Tennyson that the child was never and never breathed. Because it has not breathed, it can circulate without the fear of being snuffed out or asphyxiated by harsh criticism from the “barren lips of fools.” Names for Tennyson are also problematic insofar as they deny the poet and the poem any separate autonomy or difference. A stillborn poem is alive and dead at once.

I theorize Tennyson’s stillborn poetics through Freud’s concept of birth trauma. Birth trauma pushes back the moment of separation—most often theorized as taking place later in the infant’s development (the mirror-stage, the semantic, etc.)—to the moment of birth. Freud calls it the “first experience of anxiety.” For Tennyson, to embrace stillborn poetics means to treat the poem as separate from the self—differentiation happens *a priori*. This seems clearest in his claim that he can speak of the beauty of his stillborn son because he is a father *and* an artist: the two roles are no longer entwined. Stillborn poetics allows Tennyson a relation to his poems that is neither melancholic nor isolated.

Finally, I argue for a formal dimension of a stillborn poetics through a reading of the songs interpolated into Tennyson’s epic *The Princess*. Tennyson writes in the prologue that the songs will be sung by the women in order to create “breathing space.” He also writes that the key to understanding the entire poem is to pay attention to the child as it appears in the songs. I read the songs closely and argue that ballad measure as it functions in the blank verse of *The Princess*, becomes synonymous with the space of the child. This mobility, a formal dimension to, or

even signifier of infancy that is *not* a regression, corresponds to the spatiality of infancy that I suggest is present in Wordsworth's theory of immortality—both are positions, rather than stages.

My coda turns back very briefly to consider the ethical and critical implications of reverberation and the spatialized temporality of infancy.

Part 2: Reverberation

Having touched on the problem of separation, the critical stakes involved in my dissertation, and short descriptions of my chapters, I turn now to the question of method. As I have suggested, conventional readings of infancy in nineteenth-century British poetry tend to focus on the idealizing, humanizing, and sentimentalizing aspects of these texts. What I propose in this dissertation is a mode of criticism that pays attention instead to repetition and reverberation, interruption and doubt, disunity and asymmetrical (historical, psychological, cultural, social, and poetic) forms. I argue that there is an aesthetic corollary to the spatialized temporality of infancy, an aesthetic space of reverberation and repetition. Traditionally, this has been figured as a solitary place of creativity and autogenesis. In order for this space also to be an *ethical* space, I show how this bounded space contains the traces, shadows, and potential presence of other people. Obviously, one potential presence is the reader. In other words, our poetic engagement with infancy mirrors our engagement with the text when we read. I call what happens in this space transferential or reverberative reading. In fact, as much as I am attempting to describe an alternative poetics at work in the poetry of the Romantic and Victorian period, I am equally interested in proposing an alternative method of reading these poems today.

Ironically, this model of reading is already present in the prose of P. B. Shelley. When he writes in *A Defense of Poetry* that a “child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it” he is at once describing the origins of poetic pleasure and introducing a theory of mimesis. Infancy and poetry are simultaneously “expressed” in “*relation to the objects which delight*” the poet / infant. At first the child is passive, a mere lyre that “trembles and sounds” with the wind. But soon it prolongs pleasure in the body by mimetic repetition and reverberation. The child desires to continue the “duration of the effect” in or to prolong “consciousness of the cause” (480, 81 italics added). If Shelley seems at times to be constrained by the metaphor of the lyre or the harp that is because it is a received figure. Whereas in S. T. Coleridge’s “Eolian Harp,” written over twenty years earlier, the cause of poetic inspiration is “one intellectual breeze,” here the instrument—child or poet—is motivated from the first by a bodily, not intellectual pleasure. The cause behind this effect is presumably the parents or, and this is the crucial transposition, nature.¹¹ Furthermore, unlike the “complex feeling of delight” that Wordsworth posits in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, this pleasure is not added to the poetry to “temper” pain, but is instead produced in order to prolong an already existing pleasure.

The prolongation of pleasure by the infant or poet happens in a *space* that reverberates to and with a body that is subject and uniquely attuned to the sensations of circulation. Shelley suggests that, unlike the lyre which is merely mimetic, the body is governed by a principle that produces harmony as well as melody. In other

words, it is structurally responsive and additive. The plasticity and vastness that had been on the side of the breeze (i.e. impression) in Coleridge's formulation are here on the side of the body of the infant (i.e. expression). The surface of the human body itself then corresponds to an instrument that "trembles and sounds." This structurally responsive expressive surface seems diametrically opposed to the privileged classical philosophical categories of interiority, sight, and impression, what Coleridge terms the "tyranny of the eye." Shelley's initial "reflected image of that impression" gives way to aural sensation and touch, which gives way to what Timothy Morton refers to as an "imageless truth" (Morton The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic).¹²

Reverberation, my term for this trembling and responding, reorients our critical thinking away from metaphors of interiority and temporality toward metaphors of exterior space. Recent studies have suggested that childhood comes to be more stable category for reflection and theorization at the same time as the concept of human interiority (Steedman, Benzaquién). This is no doubt correct. Yet from here, critics tend to bemoan the sentimentalizing of the child, either because it supports and underwrites liberal individualism in its more disciplinary aspects (i.e. recapitulating [economic & subjective] development, reinforcing the turn inward toward domesticity, erasure or containment of the feminine, etc.) or because it masks the real historical conditions of children at the same time as it naturalizes them, or both. Again, there is no doubt that these kinds of ideological processes take place. Yet my dissertation argues that reading infancy as a spatialized temporality, in which processes of reverberation slow down or speed

up, or are perhaps *felt* (rather than merely seen) more clearly, destabilizes these readings and shows not only how strange, interruptive, and disorienting babies in poems can be, but also how strange, interruptive, and disorienting reading is. In the first instance, these intervals of instability seem especially acute when poets consider their own children. As I demonstrate in my chapters on S. T. and Sara Coleridge, distortions and confluences that tend to arise in these moments because encountering an infant, especially one's own, means encountering in the present a material image of one's past and one's futurity. Yet even poems that lack that parental narrative and that are usually thought to be grand narratives of the ideology of childhood (like Wordsworth's ode) are radicalized by this transferential space of reverberation. Wordsworth's odd solution in the ode, that is, imagining the child as "trailing clouds of glory" from God testifies to yearning to uncover a kernel of experience or origin (*telos* and *ontos*) at the heart of all of this reverberation.

In his essay "On Love" Shelley renames this imageless truth an unattainable love. Its prototype is the "infant [that] drains milk from the bosom of its mother." From this encounter with a heteronymous other, Shelley shifts the focus back toward identity. Writing that we "thirst after [our own] likeness," Shelley anticipates the misrecognition that drives Lacan's mirror-stage. Reverberation then may have at its origin an occluded sound or motion. My own sense is that all origins are in some sense shifting or occluded. In so far as reverberation is not a primarily visual phenomenon, and that it requires surface (sensation) to feel and a space in which to sound, it seems to respond to "vibrations" that occur in memory ("Music when soft

voices die”), even if, or especially if, that memory is bodily or beneath the level of consciousness.

Shelley quickly abandons the analogy of the infant poet in the remainder of his *Defense*.¹³ Yet this is not because the poet or infant has moved on to another stage or level. Rather, Shelley’s analogy slides sideways, it morphs, making infancy into a controlling conceit for a number of concentric circles of systems that surround and enfold us: “the youth of the world” (481), “the infancy of art” (481), “the infancy of society” (482), and again “the infancy of the world” (486), and so on. The analogy’s metonymic slide causes infancy to become less of trope in the *Defense* than a consistently evolving topos.¹⁴ Classifying infancy in this way also helps us to map the many uses to which the image of the infant is put in the unfolding logic of the essay. And while it is not my purpose to track the ubiquitous analogue of infancy throughout this period (it is especially prevalent in romantic theories of language and poetics such as Rousseau’s, Shelley’s, Herder’s, Schilling’s, and even Matthew Arnold’s), I am interested in marking and remarking on the ways in which infancy is displaced and de and re-temporalized in Shelley’s text. For although Shelley never explicitly references the mother-baby dyad, he places that *relation* (infant to world as infant to mother) at the core of his poetics and his politics, that is, at the foundational moment of our “social being.” To reverberate then is not only to be in relation, but it is also to be responsive to the other. Shelley underscores this point in the *Defense* when he writes that society as such only begins “from the moment that two human beings *co-exist*” (481 italics added).

It follows then that the intimate space described by Shelley in the first several paragraphs of his *Defense* is an already always social space, and that it takes on certain formal and generic characteristics in the poetry of the period. Recalling that infancy is already always a space of poetic origination in the texts of this period helps explain why babies continue to crop up in the poetry long after they could convincingly signify a Rousseauian connection to nature or a Lockean epistemic purity. My interest in this emphatic recurrence of infancy is not whether or not it indexes a romantic or sentimental dimension, but rather how it functions as an interruptive force, a spatial and temporal reverberation. For babies, in life *or* in poems, tend to function as interruptions of the status quo. These interruptions attenuate reverberation, that is, they create such temporal and spatial displacements that it becomes difficult to identify original sounds or motions, in part, as I state above, because infants represent the past and the future at once. The result experienced by the parent / poet is a kind of feedback loop.

Neither these specific qualities nor the spatial dimension of infancy more generally has been sufficiently commented on in the literature. I believe that at least one significant reason for this absence is the predominance of what I would term symptomatic readings, or those that rely too heavily on the repressive hypothesis, which tend to reduce the irregularities and gaps in poems and their (literary historical, formal, and biographical) environments to either the evincing of drives and complexes working under the surface, or the effacement of the *real* historical and cultural conditions of childhood.¹⁵ Either way, these ways of reading tend toward erasure. In the case of the first reading, every impulse or compulsion in the poem is

read according to a preordered emotional or psychological lexicon. In the case of the second reading, every impulse or compulsion works to cover over or obscure the means of its own production. These forms of reading have recently been associated with the hermeneutics of suspicion, a term that, ironically, as been directed toward bad practitioners of new historicism. Much psychoanalytically inflected literary theory, by inscribing an internalized oedipal dilemma at the heart of every conflict, not only fails to recognize its own desire, but it treats each poem as a bounded, singular consciousness. It shuts out—internalizes, narrativizes—all relations between poet and poem, poem and context, and, most importantly for my discussion, the relation between the poem and the reader.¹⁶

Part 3: Transference

But what exactly does it mean, or more importantly, what would it *feel* like, as a reader, to reverberate? My concept of reverberation, derived partly from psychoanalytic theories of transference and counter-transference, happens in something like an imagined or remembered space. Obviously, for something to be imagined, remembered, or initially perceived it must also have happened or *still* be happening in time. Henri Bergson refers to these modes of thought or being as “pure memory” (imagination), “memory image” (memory), and perception. Bergson refutes the associationist claim that one can be in any one of these states without the other.¹⁷ Instead, he argues that they exist on a spectrum and are always co-mingled. The implication is that all of our experience of time is thickened with memory, perception, and imagination. What happens, Bergson says, when we try to think of ourselves in space, as extended, is that we immediately recognize that our present is

“both a perception of the immediate past and a determination of the immediate future” (138). This awareness, I argue, when it penetrates our habitual day to day striving, when it *interrupts* our habitual being or *reading*, results in something like a spatialized temporality, a slowing or speeding up of time, in other words, conscious reverberation.

In the poems and texts that I consider, this process tends to be triggered by musing over, addressing, or simply observing infants. What follows are momentary pauses in the thought in which the reverberations slow down or speed up and the present moment seems unstable. We feel, in other words, an interval. In those moments the reverberations seem particularly acute. Ordinary cognition seems to break down and there is confusion between internal thoughts and perceptions, between past and future, between percipient and perceived. My sense is that reverberation differs from the classical idea of echo in that with echo, there is a dying away of one sound before you get its response. In phenomenological terms, echo corresponds more closely with the associationist belief that there is a stable past or present or future. In terms of contemporary recording technology, echo is not acoustical—that is, it is not reliant on the *space* in which the sound is made.¹⁸ It was initially produced in the nineteen-fifties by setting two tape recorders up and varying their synchronization by a split second. The early Elvis Presley records have this type of “slap-back” effect on his voice. Echo then is a form of call and answer.

In Ovid, you may remember that Echo is transformed into nothing but voice and bone, the bone eventually becoming stone. Thus Echo becomes herself a space. But she can only repeat. Therefore, it is possible to imagine a space between iteration

and reply. Reverberation, on the other hand—think of a tube amplifier with “spring reverb”—thickens pauses (between thoughts, sounds, memory, perception, imagination) to such a degree that it complicates any attempts to arrive at an origin or original utterance, moment, or sound. This thickness corresponds to the thickness of temporality and duration in Bergson’s phenomenology. For example, one might read Wordsworth’s “There was a boy” with an ear toward reverberation rather than echo. Even in the tumult of frequent call and response, the “long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud / Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild / Of jocund din” there is only the *rumor* of silence. When the owls stop answering the boy, he begins to hear in what initially seemed like silence the murmur of “the voice / Of mountain-torrents,” which carry him off to the *bosom* of the mountain lake (notice how the mother-child relation reasserts itself here spatially), even it seems, to his imminent death. What I call “in-the-middle-ness” acknowledges that there are *always* constant sounds, associations, reverberations, even in poetic pauses.

By reading the reverberations that occur within the space of infancy (i.e. between the poet and the represented infant) rather than merely focusing on representations or images of infants, I hope to uncover in these irreducibly strange moments new possibilities for thinking and writing about these poems, as well as new ways of being in the world. Reverberation might also be conceived as happening across periods. Thus, my choice to write about Romantic and Victorian era poets, while it happened somewhat intuitively and before I had happened upon the concept of reverberation, shows the strange and counter-intuitive ways in which a in a Tennyson poem can reverberate with the poetry of Erasmus Darwin, a writer whose

poems Tennyson likely had little knowledge of. In other words, reverberation does away with concepts such as influence and authorial intent, theories that are deeply indebted to the repressive hypothesis.

In contrast to these oedipal models, object relations theory—as theorized by Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, et al—privileges space, play, splitting, and position over complexes, stages, repression, and drives. And while I claim object relations theory as my primary theoretical ground, main interest is *any* methodology or practice that focuses on transference processes and transference space. As such, I make no attempt to keep a strict dividing line between concepts and theories of one movement or another. I use both object relations and more classical Freudian theory in this dissertation. What I hope to articulate is a flexible modality, not a totalizing system. And in fact, just as it is part of the intrinsic argument of *Breathing Space* that there are more similarities between many romantic-era and “Victorian” poems than there is difference, so too periods of psychoanalytic theorization and practice are permeable. Melanie Klein for example, at the founding moment of object relations theory, makes the death instinct identical to aggression, and describes a splitting in the id, which results from the “fusion of the two instincts” (Klein Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works, 1921-1945 250, 1).

Another benefit of recognizing primal and pre-Oedipal theories of separation is that they may point to alternative ways of addressing or redressing what has come to be called the “linguistic turn,” the logjam created by structuralism’s and poststructuralism’s embrace of Saussurean linguistics. On the other hand, attempts to get *at* the text or the historical moment, without mediation, without recognition of

reverberation, seem to me to be misguided and idealistic. My own interest in these theories, aside from their practical critical applications in helping to understand the psychological, cultural, and even metrical issues at work in the poems I write about here, is that they may potentially revise the ways we speak about our own desires (critical and otherwise) to return to states of non-differentiation.

This critical self-reflexivity or reverberation might be productively thought of as transference reading. I suggest that transference is an unthought element of the psychoanalytic situation, at least by literary critics. What I have in mind is an open acknowledgement of and engagement with the processes of transference that occur when reading and writing—*reading as reverberation*. Recent attempts to connect reading with psychoanalysis have focused on the processes of introjection, incorporation, and projection (Jacobus). Peter Brooks uses transference as a model of reading, one in which the reader must “refuse the text’s demand in order to listen to its desire.” For Brooks, literary form becomes the medium of desire. Yet what still is not accounted for in Brooks’ model however is the critic’s desire, that is, his counter-transference, the particular feelings, thoughts, and reverberations, often adventitious to the text, which come forward in the reader and must be worked through *between* text and critic (Brooks 12).

Another articulation of transference and counter-transference comes from Jessica Benjamin. She writes specifically of a feminine transference as a “space to become absorbed with internal rhythms rather than reactive to the outside” (161). Benjamin conceives of this feminine transference as the difference between being held and being penetrated, the latter of course being the phallic, masculine, and

predictably Freudian version. She further contrasts intrapsychic processes (i.e. what happens in conventional transference) with intersubjective processes (i.e. what might potentially happen in her alternative model of transference). Benjamin claims that what is being sought in the newer theory is one's "true self." In other words, rather than using transference and counter-transference to help the analysand work through unconscious material, Benjamin's intersubjectivity would have the analyst "recognize" and "know" the analysand. Presumably out of these encounters, the analysand would come in contact with some a priori self. What I admire about Benjamin's theory is its focus on "collaboration" rather than paternalism. Yet the idea of a "true" self revealed in transference seems to me problematic, as problematic, I would argue, as a true interpretation of a text. Benjamin allows in a footnote the many pitfalls of the expression yet she deploys it all the same. Furthermore, the spatialization that Benjamin imagines in her account of transference is the imagined inside of the analyst's body, her womb. This is a fascinating and useful rethinking of transference. Yet transferential or reverberatory intervals I write about seem imagined in a space *external* to the self; they are moments, again spatialized temporalities, when the other (text or baby) seems strange, disorienting—a challenge to, rather than a part of, the self. .

Reverberation differs because, via transference, these important and sometimes disorienting processes happen with the *bounded space* of the aesthetic encounter—an encounter that is not merely between reader and text, but, because of the reverberation that is imminent in reading, it is also an encounter with reader and other readers, reader and writer, writer and putative reader, etc. Transference and

counter-transference add an emotional element to the epistemology of reading insofar as they allow for empathy, love, hate, attraction, revulsion, but all within the space of the poem. That is, affect returns to the critical situation but instead of being theorized as an encounter with the sublime, that is, as a one-way street, it is thought of, experienced, and *felt* as inter-connective.¹⁹ The concept of an *external* unconscious (Bollas 202(Lacan The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 131)), present in the transference, allows us to theorize inter-connectedness after the death of the subject (Terada; Jacobus).²⁰

As critics, this self-forgetting or spatialized temporality, which is never complete, may allow for a space of open interpretation. It may allow us to *use* reverberation rather than shun it, always remembering that there are always at least two temporalities at work, ours and the work's, and that they are often out of synch. Lacan reminds us that transference is in fact a closure in the unconscious, not an opening; he introduces the figure of a knot, a metaphor that captures the sense in which strands of feeling come from both directions—patient and analyst (The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 130, 31). Ironically, the closure that precipitates transference often feels more “real” than what went before: “there is a complete change of scene; it is as though some piece of make-believe had been stopped by the sudden irruption of reality” (Freud, Strachey and Freud 162). Transference thus acts as a “pivot between the knowledge level and the emotional level” (Kristeva New Maladies of the Soul 78). Reading transferentially blocks utopian attempts to produce a final or original reading. It comes closer to Julia Kristeva's semiotic than to Lacan's ideal-I state, insofar the semiotic describes non-

linguistic languages and awarenesses of separation—that is, it acknowledges an a priori schism (in the self as well as in the art work). By including transference and counter-transference in the critical process it becomes possible to open the question of a “shared space,” and to use work that theorizes the space of the analytic situation to rethink the work we do as literary critics.

Furthermore, as I stress above, transference returns the concept of affect (pleasure / pain) to the center of the reading, writing, and criticism of poetry. D. W. Winnicott particularly conceives of the analytic situation as being a recapitulated space of infancy wherein the analyst assumes the position of the mother and the analysand the position of the infant. Feeling enters in over reason insofar as feelings, especially irrational feelings—hate is extremely important for Winnicott—are felt toward the infant, that is in counter-transference. Transference and counter-transference further reproduces the imperative to feel (pleasure / pain) that underwrites Shelley’s description of poetic creation. Sight, the faculty of enlightenment reason, is down-played in that process, whereas faculties conventionally considers less empirically stable—sound, smell, touch—are privileged. They are privileged in the originary relation with the mother (Irigaray “Another ‘Cause’--Castration”; Olkowski “Only Nature Is Mother to the Child”) at the same time as they are privileged in the analytic situation: the patient traditionally lies on a couch unable to *look at* the analyst, relying instead on the sound of his or her voice, the feelings associated with the touch of the couch, the air temperature, etc. (Irigaray “The Setting in Psychoanalysis”).

By reconsidering the poetic scene of reading as being similar to the analytic situation—both create spaces for language and transference communication—it also becomes possible to conceive of spatiality, as I do to some extent in all of my chapters, as including the formal space of the poem: meter, enjambment, allusion, etc. That is to say, echoing Brooks, what gets interpreted in transference is form. In these readings space is always temporalized: the content or emotion that arises in transference is less important than how, when, or why it occurs. In fact, to return to a term we don't use much any more outside of the composition classroom, "close reading" is in some sense an attempt to deal spatially, with the on-going temporality in poems, to slow down the poem or passage in order to focus on its form. Including theories of transference in formal critical practice would mean considering formal anomalies, breaks, and repetitions poems not merely in terms of what a particular trope might signify (e.g., sprung rhythm = anxiety), but rather what the effect of a trope is in the local argument of the poem. Attempts to focus on the effects of poetic tropes such as apostrophe and prosopopoea have run aground on the subject-object problem. That is, they have tended to articulate the situation as one of the subjectivization of the poet's encounter, or lack thereof, with an "other" that will authorize, or in Hegel's terms "recognize" the poet, thereby activating her subjectivity (Culler "Apostrophe"; Johnson).

Transference and counter-transference provide the possibility of a more fluid description of what happens when the writer/reader and poet/poem relations are mediated by apostrophe or other interruptive tropes. A potential space between the two opens up, or closes: time seems to slow down or speed up; why and how and by

how much or little are questions that a study of reverberation and transference may help us to ask and answer. What I am aiming at, and what I believe the poems that I work with here both suggest and open themselves up to, is a criticism that is both intimate, as in close reading, and distant, as in the new historicism, at the very same time—in short, a criticism that reverberates.

¹ Some of the important milestones in that critical history are Peter Coveney's *The Image of Childhood* (1967), Judith Plotz's *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (2001), from a historical perspective: Carolyn Steedman's *Strange Dislocations*, (1994) from a queer theory perspective: James Kincaid's *Child Loving* (1992), and, importantly from a cultural studies perspective: Philippe Ariés' *Centuries of Childhood* (1960).

² Frances Ferguson has recently written about what she calls the "afterlife" of the romantic child. She locates this afterlife within post-structuralist philosophy and debates about the sexual status of children, arguing that in the romantic era "children become the representatives of the inevitable limitation of the reach of doctrine, of belief, of being able to say what you mean and mean what you say in every moment" (223)

³ There are of course studies that build on Ariés and Michele Foucault: James Christen Steward, Archive University Art Museum and Pacific Film, Gardens Dixon Gallery and and Museum Joslyn Art, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730-1830* (Berkeley: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1995). and Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

⁴ Intersubjectivity is Jessica Benjamin's term for what happens in the space of infancy: Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). (I address Benjamin's larger argument about transference below.) I find intersubjectivity problematic primarily because we cannot be sure we are dealing with subjects here in the strictest sense of the word. This is especially the case when I speak of the sense of connectedness one might feel with a text.

⁵ It seems to me that we even attempt to reproduce this oneness under the names of postmodernism and post-humanism—see Chapter 3 for my reading of Erasmus Darwin's aesthetic and its implications for a critique of the anti-humanist position.

⁶ Hegel's opening lecture on Aesthetics focuses on the dual meaning of the word, and perhaps marks one early point of their separation: he defines the aesthetic as a "science of sensation or feeling," arising at a specific point in German history when works of art were supposed to evoke "pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, etc." (3). The modern work of Art, on the other hand, should be born, not of the body, but of the mind (4).

⁷ For feeling studies see Dorothea Olkowski, *The Universal (in the Realm of the Sensible): Beyond Continental Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after The "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). and Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after The "Death of the Subject"*.

⁸ There is good textual evidence that Blake conceived of the child as having no name because of the "ancient custom of baptizing (or christening) children on the third day after birth" (Minot).

⁹ See Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant assigns the subject the temporal dimension, whereas space is the realm of the object or external world.

¹⁰ As I explain, using Maria Torok's distinction, introjection, that is, a mechanism by which the object is taken into the ego, is conceived of as the more normative and "healthy" process. In the chapter, I take issue somewhat with this distinction. Put another way, these eighteenth and nineteenth-century aesthetic theories allow for a reciprocal critique of twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory.

¹¹ See Hogle for the ways in which the *Defense* revises the terms of received poetic and philosophical “truth,” the ways in which it points “to iconoclastic *processes* of revisionary reinterpretation in poetic thoughts and metaphors, either within single poetic visions or throughout the history of Western poetry” (117).

¹² “This kind of redeemed metaphor does not punctuate the skin of fantasy, but gently glides along it, embodying it with the metonymic richness of an environment that is, in the ecological words of *Queen Mab* viii, 'habitable'.”

¹³ This is despite the fact that the newspapers of his day were quick to accuse him of abandoning his own flesh and blood children

¹⁴ I evoke this topographical term here in a purposeful and non-Aristotelian sense in order to call attention to the spatial rather than rhetorical dimensions of infancy and poetics. See also Hayden White’s differentiation between historical topoi and tropes: Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987)..

¹⁵ By commenting on the “repressive hypothesis,” I mean to reference Foucault’s more well-known argument in the second example, and Deleuze’s lesser-known critique of repression in the first. See for example Gilles Deleuze and Leopold Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism* (New York: Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1989) 57-68 and 103-10 Briefly on Foucault’s repressive hypothesis, certain historicist critics seem to have used Foucault to focus on retrieving in the archive repressed material, which is signified by the ubiquitous discourses of prohibition. This seems to me to simply repeat repression on yet another level and to miss Foucault’s essential point, which is that the discourse of prohibition *is* the proliferating and abundant discourse rather than a signifier of a hidden or underground discourse or practice.

¹⁶ In this way, it resembles vulgar Marxist literary criticism, which seeks to reduce all enigmatic or concealed elements either to bourgeois mystifications or to economic determinations.

¹⁷ Interestingly, S T Coleridge rejects associationism on the very same grounds: [Notebooks:](#)

¹⁸ Strictly speaking of course neither “effect” needs to be produced acoustically or analogically in the studio any more; everything is digital

¹⁹ cf Winnicott’s “Hate in the Counter-Transference” and Ellie Ragland’s “The Passion of Ignorance in the Transference.”

²⁰ cf. Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after The "Death of the Subject"*.and Jacobus in response Mary Jacobus, "Response: Imagining Things," *Textual Practice* 22.1 (2008)..

Chapter 2

Reforming the Space of the Child: the Reception of Wordsworth's Ode

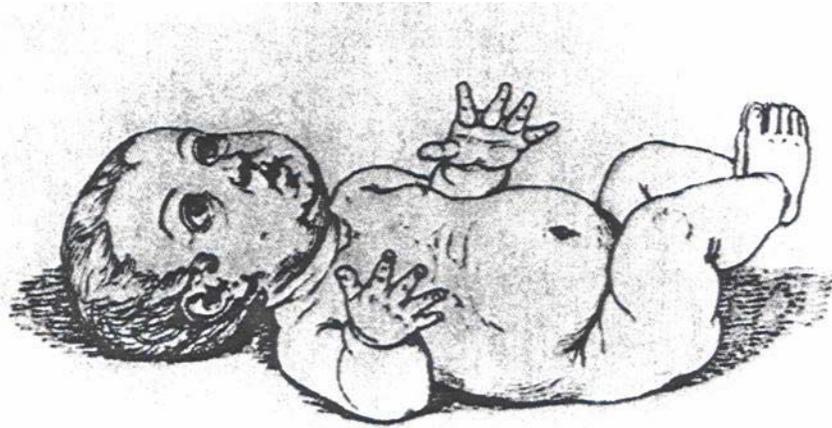


fig 1

by Otto Runge

In Wordsworth studies in particular, as well as in poetry criticism more generally, the use of psychoanalysis has largely resulted in a criticism that seeks to “explain” features of the poetry in light of the poet’s personal losses – e.g., Wordsworth’s early loss of both parents.¹ The best of the newer work focuses on melancholy, in its many modern and post-modern permutations.² These studies tend to center, for obvious reasons, on *The Prelude*. My approach here is different in at least two (perhaps related) ways: I focus on a work, “The Immortality Ode,” that is not about the

“growth of a poet’s mind.” It does not attempt to describe a process of “development”; neither is it primarily concerned with trauma or loss.

British object relations theory is particularly useful for thinking about infancy and childhood in Romantic and Victorian poetry because it potentially rescues intensely solipsistic and overly-individualistic models of Freudianism by returning the dynamic of another person (analyst in the transference, or the parent in the primal scene—both potentially present in the reader), obsessing over similar themes and objects as the poetry—individual and collective, mind and nature, subject and object, domesticity and public life. Furthermore, later revisions of Freudian theory move psychoanalytic discourse closer to the philosophical discourses operative around and in nineteenth-century poetry itself. Above all, what these connections make clear is that psychoanalysis, like poetry and poetics, is at bottom a *writing practice*, in tension with other practices and disciplines. Each of these discourses reveal in unique ways how the child in these representations functions as the *ur*-metaphor for a version of the self that run *transparently*, although not unquestioned, through poetic, philosophical, psychological, and psychoanalytic discourses. At issue in both discourses is their *mutual identification of the space of the child with the space of experience and the aesthetic*. In the course of mapping out all these connections and identifications, I will touch on problems in Romanticism and Victorian studies more generally: development or *bildung*; poetic form; historicism; formalism; aesthetic theory; the politics of individualism and isolation; bourgeois family culture; the disenchantment and the increasing scientization of the child.

My method will be to focus on Matthew Arnold's and J. S. Mill's receptions of Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode"—respectively, their ambivalent refusal or wholesale embrace of its poetic and philosophic idealizations of the child, what both men agree is Wordsworth's bad philosophy.³ The best philosopher then, the six-years darling of stanza 7, becomes a figure or a form, which gets refigured or reformed, troped, embraced, and rejected throughout the nineteenth century.⁴ Matthew Arnold troubles over the figure of the child. John Stuart Mill contrastively puts forward a salvational encounter with the poem. The identification that Mill accomplishes in his autobiography, while fascinating, is more conventional, closer to that of a psycho-textual "working through." To identify (in Freud) is partly to resolve the Oedipal complex. An inverse identification, that is, an identification with the child, could be read as either the residue of an "unsuccessful" identification, a projective identification, or an anomaly within the structure of Freudian and Kleinian identification itself (Klein 197-198). It would represent what it does not "go" to the father, that which escapes the narrative of subjectivity. In any case, Mill is the quintessential "Wordsworthian." By this I mean that his identification with the child and poet in the ode make possible a reclamation, a retrieval of a childhood history, which may, in fact, never have existed. In this way, perhaps Mill signals a collective identification with the child (and with Wordsworth), one that we—Anglo-Americans at least—have all taken on. Arnold, on the other hand, tends to resist identification with the poetic child. As the readings that follow will show, these categorizations, while useful, are somewhat more fluid and mixed than I've suggested. Provisionally, I believe they hold true enough to demonstrate the unique power of this "bad

philosophy,” how specific representations of the poetic infancy constitute investigations into the limits of the human that transcend received critical and aesthetic conceptions of “origin,” “presence,” and “experience.”

Besides object relations theory, I call on certain contemporary philosophic theories in order to show how the “spatialization of infancy” functions in the Ode and Wordsworth’s related prose. As I use it, spatiality is a philosophical and poetic concept whereby experience and childhood is not something internalized, incorporated, or “worked through” by the individual as a process of *Bildung* or development, but rather operates as a sort of transitional space or “position” to which one can freely come and go, allowing for a model of subjectivity that needn’t be driven by (or perhaps, *to*) skepticism, as in Arnold’s account, or by the processes of normalization and identification, as in Mill’s. A poetic space of infancy, in other words, offers a third way. Embracing a model of experience that is “split” (incorporating intuition *and* reason), fluid rather than fixed, horizontal rather than vertically arranged, spatiality suggests an ethics and politics—of the child and thereby the self—that is neither stagist nor productivist. The conflation of the space of the child with the aesthetic space of the poet further complicates and deepens this picture. It opens up new possibilities for conceiving of the aesthetic dimension as only one of several “positions” available to the subject. Thus at the heart of Wordsworth’s poetry and poetics, often evaluated as quietist and regressive, we find the kernel of a radical difference, the deterritorialized space of the poetic child.

Finally, my concept of the spatiality of infancy resonates with Timothy Morton’s concept of an ambient poetics. Morton imagines ambient poetics, evident

in his reading of Wordsworth, as existing “beyond any notion of conceptuality” (52). For Morton, an ecological being-present is suggested by several of Wordsworth’s poems, something he terms a “depthless ecology.” Similarly, I’m interested in revealing an anti-depth model of subjectivity present in the spatiality of the child and Wordsworth’s theory of immortality. In the light of this new model, development, organicism, and *Bildung*, or in the twentieth century terms of ego-psychology, “individuation”—all progressivist models of depth—are consequently subject to revision and reconfiguration. Thus we see that Hegel’s spiral of becoming, so important to mainstream narratives of Romanticism, is flattened out. This flattened out space, whether represented or imagined as an aesthetic dimension or as the “semiotic” space of the child, corresponds with what Anne-Lise Francois has termed Wordsworth’s natural piety, a “kind of trust and openness to contingency” (63).

This chapter in particular, and my dissertation project more generally, does not attempt a phenomenology of the child, is not, in fact, about the child at all, but rather about the *relation* between representations of the child and the adult poet/reader. As such, natural piety, as revealed through the poetic space of infancy, does not reinscribe a sense of purity within the represented child. It marks the *absence* of any such concepts (purity, corruption, etc.) altogether. The central metaphor for this in my chapter is Freud’s influential yet brief description of ego “splitting” in “Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process.” The child chooses not to choose between pleasure and reality, or chooses to have them both (Freud says this amounts to the same thing). Choosing not to choose is to be two places, two persons, if not at once, then at least in quick succession. Because in this split model there is no

telos or loss, it defies organic processes of unification and signals a relaxation of drives to “become.” Becoming is undone by the lack of necessity for choosing—in other words, the production and reproduction of a self—and eternal “return” is undone because, as the logic of the Ode itself has it, we can “in a moment travel thither.”

Lodged in this chapter’s account of these revisionary processes is a question about what it means that our sense of who and what we are in the world is still wedded to models of depth and narratives of development. Especially here in America, the first eight years of the twenty-first century have seen us living through a period of rhetorical appeals to geopolitical essentialism which seem to resemble nothing else so much as nineteenth-century historical determinism. Consider, for example, President Bush’s claim of a “a struggle between freedom and tyranny” and a “path to lasting security,” in which there is “no middle ground.”⁵ No middle ground and no child left behind—these narratives of certainty, duty, and progress lean heavily on models of liberalism and development, of “recapitulation,” of internal and external struggle (nationalism arising in an incestuous and reciprocal relation to individualism [think of Coleridge’s “political writing” in *The Friend*])⁶, all of which we can see concretized in many of our narratives of infancy. One premise of this chapter is that an intensive reading of the reception of Wordsworth’s Ode reveals an ethics or politics of infancy, a depthless relation to the child and to the remembered self that slowly begins to take shape. And it is against this backdrop, and through the cracks of Arnold’s conservative skepticism of the child (his fear of singularity and

otherness) and Mill's wholesale incorporation of its figurations (his faith in the power of a universal narrative) that the lineaments of this new spatiality can be glimpsed.

Part 1 **Wordsworth's Bad Philosophy and the Role of the Child**

It could be argued that Matthew Arnold's 1879 edition of Wordsworth's poems attempts a kind of reformation or rephrasing,⁷ a cleansing or classicizing of Wordsworth's poetic legacy.⁸ In its preface, Arnold refers to the "Immortality Ode" as the cornerstone of Wordsworth's "bad philosophy." It is a philosophy, he insists, that must be dismissed in order that the poetry itself might be appreciated. Centering on the "idea of the high instincts and affections coming out in childhood," it fails because it is not universally true. Not everyone, says Arnold, possesses an immediate connection to nature as a child; "many people, perhaps the majority of *educated* persons" have no connection to nature at all as children, but rather find the love of nature "strong and operative" later in life. Arnold's refusal of Wordsworth's ontology of the child shows us a) that he is a good historicist critic, seeking to historicize the particular conditions of childhood, the child, and love of nature by refusing their predicative idealization; b) that the liberal "turn to nature," popularized though not inaugurated by the Lake poets, had already made its way so far inside of culture as to have effaced its point of entry; and c) that by denying the child its transcendental origin, we are left with a vacant, vulnerable, and pre-subjective child, one that is prefigured elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry (chiefly, in the *Lyrical Ballads*),⁹ and one that in various forms will continue to haunt Arnold and all of Anglo-American poetry down to the present.¹⁰ The useful threat that Arnold's reading poses for mainstream theories of romanticism and phenomenology is that by

denying the universal *particularity* of the remembered child and/or childhood, we risk impoverishing our concept of experience by refusing its power to guarantee a recognizable sense of self, reducing it to static *singularity* or to mere contingent incident.

Of course, the discourse of the particular and the universal is one of the central concerns of Romanticism generally, and of Arnold's aesthetic theory more specifically.¹¹ There is, in fact an uncanny similarity, if not homology, of terms and concepts in Arnold's statements about the Wordsworthian child on the one hand, and his statements about poetry and aesthetics in general on the other. This relation itself can be contextualized within the canon of romantic poetry, which tends to reproduce the child—its body, its sounds, its futurity—as the space of poetic or aesthetic encounter; the sleeping infant or playing child metonymically comes to stand for the aesthetic object or poem itself.¹² It is here that we can recognize the power of Arnold's intervention. He initially recognizes a split or inconsistency in Wordsworth's philosophy in the Ode: his particular cannot be universalized. This split, which Hegel claims can be answered only through transcendence to Absolute spirit, is never sublated in Arnold's critique of Wordsworth. It is either—depending on your point of view—elided or endured, as it is in his larger critical project as well.¹³ Although Arnold severs philosophy from poetry in the *Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, there is no place for the particular, the contingent, for difference, in either realm. Philosophy must be the place of universal truth, and poetry must evoke universal themes. It must be disinterested. It must teach us how to live.¹⁴

Besides repudiating Romantic notions of childhood and the child, Arnold's banishment of stubborn and anomalous particularity deals a double blow to received concepts of romantic poetic creation. It refuses the trend toward unification as it effaces the Hegelian absolute subject, who, being incarnated like Christ, is the perfect marriage of universal and particular. In fact, given the close metaphoric equation of childhood, nature, and poetic voice and vocation in book one of *The Prelude*, one could even say that, in terms of Wordsworth's poetics, by banishing the child from a de-sublimated nature, it banishes the possibility of lyric expression altogether.¹⁵ Thus, Arnold's critique allows us to see that it is *precisely this gap between the particular and the universal, between experience and recognition, between intuition and concept, which childhood generally represents, and which romantic childhood and, by extension, poetic vocation, is miraculously meant to transcend*. The strain that this places on the poetic child is evinced in the hyperbolic descriptions of the child in the "Ode," which drew such objections from Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*, and which I will touch on later.¹⁶ It further accounts for the role of the child in late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century natural history, philosophy, and moral psychology, which require on the one hand that the child be entirely "for itself," yet on the other have, be available for observation, regulation, and categorization.¹⁷ The incommensurability of these aims—these splits that seem not merely inherent in the child and to our discourse, but somehow constitutive of it—is what each poetic articulation attempts to "form over," to make appear as one organic unity.¹⁸

"Have known too much—or else forgotten all"

Arnold's own poetic encounters with the child are marked by a similar malformation or split, as his anxious catechizing of the voiceless, enigmatic child in these opening stanzas of his earlier poem "To a Gipsy child by the Seashore" makes clear.¹⁹

WHO taught this pleading to unpractised eyes?
Who hid such import in an infant's gloom?
Who lent thee, child, this meditative guise?
Who mass'd, round that slight brow, these clouds of doom?

Lo! sails that gleam a moment and are gone;
The swinging waters, and the cluster'd pier.
Not idly Earth and Ocean labour on,
Nor idly do these sea-birds hover near.

But thou, whom superfluity of joy
Wafts not from thine own thoughts, nor longings vain,
Nor weariness, the full-fed soul's annoy--
Remaining in thy hunger and thy pain;

Thou, drugging pain by patience; half averse
From thine own mother's breast, that knows not thee;
With eyes which sought thine eyes thou didst converse,
And that soul-searching vision fell on me.

In what might be read as a return of the repressed, the disenchanting Gipsy child with its "pleading" and "unpracticed eyes" is refused voice and generalization in nature.

In fact, despite the preposition in the title of the poem—"Child *by* the Seashore"—the child seems entirely denied spatiality;²⁰ its only context is its non-context as a figure of alterity within a larger frame of otherworldliness. Arnold's question "WHO taught this pleading to unpracticed eyes" responds to and reframes Wordsworth's earlier question "WHERE is it now, the glory and the dream?" Thus, ontology—the child's being (in this world or the other)—is gestured to only obliquely, as it were,

intertextually. Unlike the “Ode,” the poem cannot adduce an origin for the child. It does not speak; and neither does the poet directly interpose. The poem does however attempt several implied identifications. Arnold, in a series of similes rather than apostrophes—refigurations rather than concretizations—compares the child to a hermit, an exile, an angel, and finally to a stoic.²¹ Thus we can see that whereas in Arnold’s reading of the Ode, of its “bad philosophy,” nature recedes from the child, denying the poet his received authority, here the child itself is a dark embodiment of that philosophy. Threatening and haunting rather than comforting, the child suggests a kind of impermeability; it neither embodies, nor reflects, nor incorporates nature, voice, origin, or identity. Everything is kept separate. A description of the mediations involved in the identification would be something like: child = stoic = poet = poem = self (although one could easily rearrange or reverse the order). Unlike the Ode where the child is the beginning and the end, Arnold’s poem does not differentiate between its ontological terms, therefore it has no teleology. One could enter in at any point, at any one of the selectively chosen archetypes or identifications and slide easily into another. The ultimate reversability reflected by line 48: the child having “known too much – or else forgotten all” (48) performs beautifully this uncanny slippage. It is strangely arrested, undecided, marked by a medial caesura and a dash. In this way then, the Pindaric question of causation or determination becomes not only an unanswered question about origin and identity, but also an unanswerable one of historical specificity, about belonging and place.²² Later in the chapter, I will argue for a strange connection here between Arnold’s poetic

undecidability and what I call Wordsworth's spatialization of infancy. Each suggests a revision of developmental models of subjectivity in favor of a poetics of "position."

We see Arnold further questioning the separateness of poet and nature in the 1852 poem "The Youth of Nature." The separation of poet and nature replicates on another level the separation of mother and child, as well as the separation of a desired culture of expansion and the times of critical compression that Arnold took himself (and, to some extent Wordsworth as well) to be living in.²³ In this case, the questioning seems more staged and rhetorical, Arnold acting the inquisitor—of nature this time rather than of the child/ poet. Whereas "Gipsy Child" was written when Wordsworth was still alive and could be imagined/catechized in the guise of an otherized and otherizing child, "Youth of Nature" antedates by no more than two years Wordsworth's death. In a letter, Arnold calls it "Wordsworth's pindaric," formally placing it in the shadow of the Ode.²⁴ It is not so much a rephrasing of that work as it is an inquiry into what Arnold sees as its problematic foundation: on the one hand, its stubborn particularity, and on the other, the related question of Wordsworth's style, a question to which I will return at the end of the chapter, and one that I see as being directly and crucially related to the question of the child:

For oh! is it you, is it you,
Moonlight, and shadow, and lake,
And mountains, that fill us with joy,
Or the poet who sings you so well?
Is it you, O beauty, O grace,
O charm, O romance, that we feel,
Or the voice which reveals what you are?
Are ye, like daylight and sun,
Shared and rejoiced in by all?
Or are ye immersed in the mass
Of matter, and hard to extract,
Or sunk at the core of the world

Too deep for the most to discern?
Like stars in the deep of the sky,
Which arise on the glass of the sage,
But are lost when their watcher is gone.

59-74

The undecidability of the question is marked by the apostrophic repetitions of “O” juxtaposed against the repeated “Or.” The figure of apostrophe would ordinarily open up a self-reflexive dialogue, constituting the poet as speaking subject in relation to its object (Culler). Here, it operates as a mode of communication that is closed down *a priori* by the skeptical presence, or rather by Wordsworth’s deictic absent-presence, which is simultaneously signified by and liquefied in the constantly recurring “or.” Thematically Miltonic, the poem further reproduces the trope of heaven and hell as opposing unreachable realms in a somewhat mechanical and “metaphysical” manner. These either/or terms are not quite oppositions (heaven/hell, image/reflection, poet/nature), neither are they antagonistic or dialectical. As in “Gipsy Child,” whichever side you choose—nature/poet, immortality/bleak materiality—the “or” still remains.²⁵ The lost “watcher” is certainly Wordsworth—but isn’t it also the empiricist philosopher who cannot quite guarantee matter’s existence in the world, not to mention the child/poet, who, if the language of the *Prelude* is to be believed, experiences an “intellectual intuition” that transcends the merely sensual? At issue again is the question of an unstable particularity, a feeling or utterance that cannot be brought under a concept, a nature that needs no mind to interpret, or an uncanny gipsy child, “half averse” (half turned toward something else) from its own mother's breast.

By refusing Wordsworth's universalization of the child, spirit/nature must either be conceptualized as mute matter, speaking only through divine (i.e. poetic) interpretation, or having a voice of its own that only requires transcription, as opposed, that is, to translation. As the hyperbolic ventriloquization at the end of the poem shows, Arnold opted, at least in this poem, for the final option, that of a nature which "speaks." More than just an elegy for Wordsworth, by making unnecessary the figure of the child/poet/interpreter, the poem makes prosopopeia into an act of self-generation, almost a form of onanism. This oedipal clearing of the poetic field is partial, fraught, without recompense—a myth that kills the father (Wordsworth), leaves the son (Arnold) poetically impotent, and leaves the mother/wife (as nature) a widow. Thus, the poem reveals an ultimate emptiness in the place of the subject. Wordsworth's "spots of time" are recreated by Arnold ("The spots which recall him survive"), but they are now only geographic, textual, and characterological particulars, or rather traces of the particular: "The sheepfold of Michael survives...By the favourite waters of Ruth." Arnold, by refusing any immediate place for the poet, de-temporalizes nature, eternalizes it, strangely makes it more "Romantic" in the recent critical sense of that term, a "romantic ideology," a reified and essentialized natural world. (This feature becomes more troubling when considered in an ecological sense, in that it severs the relation between "man" and Nature," alleviating responsibility along with interconnectedness.) "Moonlight, and shadow, and lake, and mountains" becomes "beauty, grace, charm, romance." History, in the sense of subjects who can interpret or "experience" nature (in other words, in the sense of the child), has dropped out of Arnold's schema.²⁶

Clearly, “The Youth of Nature” is related to the placeless child in “Gipsy Child by the Seashore,” a logical antecedent of a nature that no longer requires poetic interpretation, and a logical descendent, or perhaps distant relative, of the evacuated child that Arnold’s critique of the Ode infers. It haunts—the poet and us—not only because it has no place in nature but also because it has no history, no memory proper to it.²⁷ Hunger and pain (“Remaining in thy hunger and thy pain”) while very nearly idealized as precursors to “vision,” are refused historical determination. Denied a verifiable inside, the exteriority of the child, and thus the poet, is complete. The other (nature, mother, reader, child) remains fixed and other. Although the unrecognizability of the child reproduces a discomfort with difference, as well as with encroaching cultural and ethnic otherness and foreignness, which Arnold expresses elsewhere in his criticism (and which Wordsworth equally expresses, most notably in this case, in his poem the “Gipsies”), here, in Arnold’s poetry, the anxiety cannot be theorized or even fully owned. Instead we get projections and repeated vain attempts to analogize the child. Psychically, the poet needs to situate the child—temporally, spatially, historically, and culturally—in order to establish and secure his own relation to it. Yet as mightily as he struggles, the child remains opaque. Thus, the circle of gloom (poet to child and back again) cannot be squared by acts of associated imaginative selections from Arnold’s own personal past; nor can it find a frame of reference within the indexical codes of nationality (the exile), religion (the angel), or poetic or philosophic legacy (the stoic). The text that I’m alluding to (and expanding on) here is, of course, Freud’s “Screen Memories,” a text which explains the

mechanisms by which memory and imagination are able to reconstruct history and thereby manage pain, confusion, and disappointment in the present.²⁸

Arnold's poetic/philosophic/aesthetic refusal of the particular is instructive, as is his refusal of Freud's retrospective romanticization, so like Wordsworth's transcendental deduction in the Ode: "having been, must always be." As we will see from Mill's "medicinal" experience of reading the Ode, bad philosophy can be both contagious and curative. For Mill, subjectivity is a project, but one that in his adaptive emotional method, can never be entirely free from the knowledge that it owes its origin to someone or something other.

The Metaphysics of Memory

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not outward beauty but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty" – i.e., it is already conditioned beauty – its value is precisely that of mediation, an immediate mediation.... – "they seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of.(Mill 126)

J. S. Mill's narrative of overcoming a depression, which resulted from an "unnatural" and "experimental" education, by reading Wordsworth's poetry is one of the most well-known and fascinating accounts of the salutary effects of poetry. Mill establishes a triad of poets for consideration. Byron, whom Mill knows and acknowledges is the superior poet, cannot relieve Mill of his dejection. Coleridge proves perfect for describing his dilemma but is unable to affect a cure. Mill ultimately discovers Wordsworth, whose poems, and more to the point, *philosophy*, seems tailor-made for Mill's recuperation. It is with the Ode, and specifically its evocation of the child, that Mill ultimately identifies. Yet his identification is neither

with the child nor with nature exactly, but rather with the poet himself: “I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it” (105). Mill’s reading is allegorical, even analogical in the extreme. But in order to see how the figure of the child is still functioning, even defensively *driving* Mill’s account, we need to remember that what first began to “cure” the philosopher of his dejection was not Wordsworth or poetry at all. Rather, Mill had been “reading, accidentally, Marmontel’s memoirs,” when he “came to the passage where [Marmontel] relates his father’s death...and how he, then a mere boy, by a sudden inspiration, felt and made them feel that he would be everything, would supply the place of everything to them”. From this moment, writes Mill, his “burthen grew lighter” (99). It is not surprising that Mill, who in many ways was haunted and shadowed by his father’s life, should be moved or “lightened” by the story of the death of the father. Furthermore, the “mere boy” in the narrative can be read as akin to the imagined child in the “Ode”—the child as father of the man. Thus, the prose narrative opens up an imagination of the father’s death—an ego death to the degree that the internalized father is cast out—that makes room for, or precipitates another, more *affective* object to enter. That object, I am arguing, is only partially the child in the “Ode,” but even more properly the poet. The child serves as a synecdoche for the feeling voice of the poet within the redemptive narrative of the poem. And it is with this “recovered” child that the philosopher identifies.

But what is most strange about Mill's identification is his evocation of a "first freshness of youthful enjoyment." There does not seem to be any trace of these feelings in Mill's descriptions of his early life in the autobiography. As I have said, it is almost as if the poem and the figure of the child make possible a reclamation of a history that never was. Perhaps this is not surprising given that the "Immortality Ode" itself plays out its redemptive themes on the razor's edge of seeming and being: "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / the earth, and every common sight, / To me did *seem* / Apparelled in celestial light" (1-4). This qualification of appearance—remember Wordsworth's injunction against the "tyranny of the eye"—begs the question as to whether this was truly a glorified state of awareness or the mere appearance of perfection, a nostalgic side effect of memory.²⁹ Later in the poem's penultimate stanza the poet grounds his invocation of the philosophic mind in the essentializing logic of "primal sympathy": "having been, [it] must always be" (183). Thus, employing a similar logic, Mill is able to construct an idealized childhood indirectly through his triangulated identification with the "best philosopher of the poem," the incorporated child within the poet.

As the slippage from *being* to *seeming* suggests, there is an explicit tension in this passage between the temporal space of infancy as a *place* of—imaginative or literal—return and that of a displacement or "re-placement." In the latter case, the space of the child forms an *a priori* condition, necessary to the ideological or mythical function of the poem. In fact, most commentators read the ambivalence that Wordsworth expresses as precisely the cost of such compensation, effects of the strain the reality principle dictates. Mill himself, in the course of defending

Wordsworth in debate, understood the “mere animal delights” of an earlier time to be irrecoverable; they are *replaced* by others.³⁰ But this should not surprise us, for as we have seen, for Mill the culture of feeling must be established through an active (i.e. aesthetic) reconstruction of a *fictive* childhood.

Infancy and History

Whereas Mill’s constructed “return” shows the dangers and benefits of projective identification, Arnold’s poems reveal the dangers and benefits of imagining a child who is not only denied a transcendent origin, but also any historical grounding whatsoever. In attempting to correct Wordsworth’s ideological universalizing of idealized childhood, ironically Arnold returns to and *reinforces* the myth of the child as poet and poet as child. Throughout the “Gypsy-Child,” Arnold establishes an identification with the silent child through the constant evocations of “gloom,” his own as well as the child’s. Therefore, it is not surprising that the final stanza prophesizes an imminent return of the child and its gloom. But it is unable to call forth what M. H. Abrams terms the “ritual language of blessing.” Immediacy and experience are simultaneously imputed to the child and refused. A “chain” of grief is what remains, to crown and link the just-anointed child to the poet.

Once, ere the day decline, thou shalt discern,
Oh once, ere night, in thy success, thy chain!
Ere the long evening close, thou shalt return,
And wear this majesty of grief again.

The return of the child that Arnold imagines in the final stanza is an inversion of Mill’s Schillerian return, whereby the poet/philosopher goes back in imagination to childhood and returns with a “state of nature in idea, which is not indeed given him by experience,” but is rather an “ultimate aim,” provided by reason, and “borrowed”

from this ideal state (*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* 28). Because in Arnold's poem there is no "state of nature," in idea or elsewhere—that is, there is no space or place or memory to which one might return—the Gipsy-Child "comes up" instead from within (the culture, the poet), but also from without—that is, from the devastated *mise en scene*. It leaves the poet (and us) nowhere (spatially or temporally) to go. In other words, like so many of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Arnold's poem refuses dialectical closure, even as it refutes the hard-won flicker of experience in the Ode.

Philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims that this inability to access experience is one of, if not the primary, conditions of modernity. He further locates this (necessarily human) condition in, what he calls the "historico-transcendental dimension" of infancy. Infancy is the theoretical crux because it precedes discourse; it is the "transcendental origin of language." Agamben does not idealize this state, as do Piaget or some readings of Lacan's "Ideal-I" stage.³¹ There is no "pre-subjective 'psychic substance'" any more than there is a "pre-linguistic subject" (48). Language and experience coexist and are mutually constituted. The change or difference that infancy signals is the move from the semiotic (babble/nature/experience) to the semantic (discourse/culture/history). Rather than being described as a "fall," it is more of a transition. Although inevitable, Agamben imagines this transition as reversible, open, and non-teleological. Rather, he suggests (following and building on Émile Benveniste) that the semiotic and the semantic are "the two transcendental limits which define and simultaneously are defined by man's infancy" (55). As we

will see, there are numerous points of conversion between Agamben, object relations theory, and Wordsworth's theory of infancy and immortality.

As a way of establishing these connections, I want to return to the supposed scene of synthesis or closure in the Ode, the passage from stanza 9, crucial to so many 20th-century critical accounts of the Ode (Wimsatt, Bloom, Hartman, Fry):

Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.
165-171

What is being offered I would argue is neither synthesis, return, nor epode, rather a spatialized point of origin. Experience, here a synonym for immortality, may be accessed (seen, heard) at any time, at any point. This crossing over is neither dialectical nor total. The ephemeral connotations of "soul" are partially undone by the sensuality of sight and hearing. What our souls *see* are the children sporting; what we *hear* are the mighty waters, which for Wordsworth are translations of, or sounds available for translation into, poetic voice, but for Arnold (think of "Dover Beach" or "Gipsy Child") are simply self-estranging.³²

Bloom, in an early reading of the Ode, sees this passage as vital. He is primarily focused on the disjunction between sight and sound, and never comments on what I see as the crucial problem of the passage, i.e., that it is our "souls" that are supposed to see and travel.³³ He literalizes and externalizes the distance in the passage, while admitting the immortal (i.e. metaphysical) nature of the sea, as well as

its “Arnoldian” confirmation of our “separateness” (*Visionary* 187, 188).

Interestingly, in a later reading of the passage, he reads this same moment as a collapse back into solipsism, thus suggesting that the distance is internal or imagined (146, 147). Either way, he reads it as alienating. Trilling, in his famous demythologizing reading of the Ode avoids the passage altogether.³⁴ I would suggest that Bloom’s inability to decide and Trilling’s (and Arnold’s) tactical omissions or refusals, point to the crux of the poem’s own ambivalence, between inside and outside, literal and imagined—precisely the spatialized temporality of the child. And, as I have already suggested, the temporal spatiality of “in a moment travel thither” further suggests unhindered transport (back and forth) between the socialized world of the semantic and a semiotic, pre-Babel state. Part of Wordsworth’s innovation is to *spatialize this split* – in several of the *Lyrical Ballads* (including “There was a boy...” and “The Thorn”) and in the epode of the ode (“Hence in a season of fair weather, though inland far we be...”). The spatialization of infancy arises as a response to the “problem” of particularization (“But there’s a Tree, of many, one, / A single Field which I have looked upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone”). Wimsatt’s reading of the Ode obliquely implies that the Ode offers a model wherein infancy/experience can be imagined spatially, as a site that is not external;³⁵ the distance between the sea and inland, which can be traveled (by the soul – thus internally) in an instant, represents the *feeling* of the collapsed immediacy of experience. Whereas Arnold’s poem holds everything in abeyance, locked into a skidding universe of empty signification, the Ode’s bad philosophy, its spatialized infancy, allows for movement, mutuality, and modification, as indicated by the

privileging of the murky, qualified, and vertiginous states of vanishings and blank misgivings.

What must be permitted for this reading of the Ode to work is an understanding, granted by neither Coleridge nor Arnold, that the knowledge imputed to the child is of an entirely different order, akin to a bodily or animal knowledge, yet within the world of sociality, culture, and language.³⁶ We will see how Wordsworth's own theory of immortality, finding resonance with recent object relations theorists, imagines a form of logic in infancy, a realm of differentiated and intuitive reason in the space of the child. Looking back then at the Ode, the move from semiotic infancy to the semantic dimension of meaning can be located in its most often criticized stanza 7.³⁷

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;

The child is seen as always-already within the semiotic world of cultural, familial, and religious signs, but he “shapes” them *by himself* (92). As Kristeva point out, the space of the semiotic is marked by a kind of *ordering*, as opposed to conceptualization, which only arises later in the semantic phase. Thus, we can track

the progression of participles and verbs from the materiality of “shaping” to the ambiguous signification of “hath” (either his heart *has* or it is *had*, or both), and finally, to the less hard to follow “frames.” I would argue that it is only when he strives to “*fit* his tongue / To dialogues of business, love, or strife” (93, 94) that he enters fully into the semantic dimension of discourse. But again, this crossing of a limit does not constitute an entrance into a symbolic order from which the child cannot return. It does not consist of a movement from one stage to another as in Freud’s oral, anal, and genital phases. Rather, it consists of *occupying a position*. While the semantic is the world of others, of order, of negotiation and dialogues rather than self-created songs, or fragments of dreams, it is also the realm of the universal, of discourse, of reflection. In part, what I am suggesting is that one function of poetic infancy is to show us how it might be possible to move or shuttle between these states or positions. Agamben further suggests that to understand this crossing-over we must move beyond our received, enlightened understandings of origin: “The origin of a ‘being’ of this kind cannot be *historicized*, because it is itself *historicizing*, and itself founds the possibility of there being any ‘history’” (49). I take Agamben’s philosophical gloss on infancy to be roughly consonant with many psychoanalytic understandings of the child, experience, and language (Kristeva and Green certainly—Lacan and Klein more partially).

So far I have been arguing for a revisionist or reconstructed reading of the Ode, which takes into account its theorization of immortality, what I have called the space of the child. I have pointed out that the space of the child orients the child (vis-à-vis Kant’s first critique) externally, whereas the temporality of the child is oriented

always already internally. Wordsworth's genius is to drive the two together through the figure of a soul that sees. Freud, Klein, Winnicott and others explore precisely this mutual contamination of subject and object, and they theorize these processes through the concepts of positionality, splitting, transitional phenomena, and transference. Arnold's reception of the ode, and his own poetic incorporation of its content, suggest a deep Wordsworthian ambivalence, that strangely only resolves itself (that is, gives us material to interpret) around the issues of poetic form, or as he has it, the question of Wordsworth's style—which in some ways is identical to the question of origin. Mill's investment in, if not investigation of, the space of the child also offers itself as a study of the aesthetic space of the poem, or as he has it, in the privileging of feeling over eloquence (348). Nancy Yousef points out that Mill's socializing of the realms of philosophy goes hand in hand with his efforts to constitute poetry as a realm for the sovereign and solitary individual. Yet she claims that this paradox of solitary sociality should not be read as constituting (of itself) the discourses of aesthetics and philosophy. Both arguments and structures of subjectivity remain within the philosophic tradition. She suggests that the efforts to prize the aesthetic or sensual from the moral or rational constitute Mill's great challenge. As I now show, Wordsworth's theory of immortality prefigures a structural account that allows for just such an intellectual intuition, a form of reason that is not conceptual, premised on an inability to discern. In other words, intimations of immortality result from the problem of causation, the problem of reverberation.

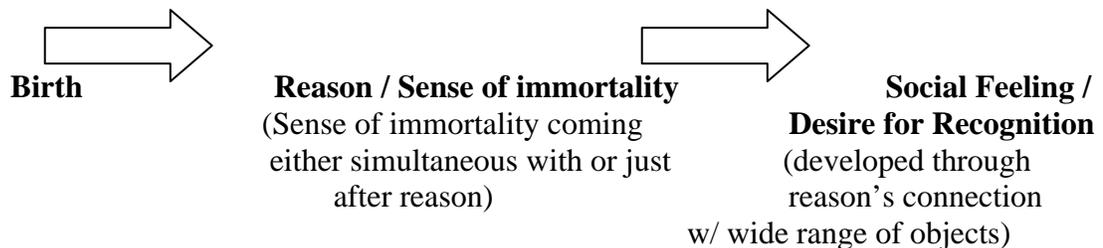
Wordsworth's Theory of Immortality

Wordsworth opens his 1810 essay “Upon Epitaphs” with a disquisition on the necessity of feelings or intimations of immortality. These feelings, he suggests, are grounded in our infancy, and “the time is not in remembrance when, with respect to our own individual Being, the mind was without this assurance” (127). Wordsworth is at pains to explain the unique mechanism within us that would cause us to desire recognition even after our deaths. “Mere love” he writes, could not have produced it. It seems that this narcissistic desire exists in us at, or *as*, the very limits of the animal and the human. A dog or a horse, which perishes in the field, cannot anticipate the sense of sorrow that his death will cause for his fellow animals. Yet even our faculty of reason, when added to the principle of love “which exists in the inferior animals,” is still not enough to account for the desire in humans (126). Some other force or principle is at work. There must be some “intermediate thought.” Wordsworth names this the “intimation or assurance within us, that some part of our nature is imperishable” (127).

Having separated man from animal, Wordsworth now sets out to explain the evolution of this desire by exploring the ontology of infancy. He imagines and addresses an interlocutor, an “unfolder of the mysteries of nature,” a disenchanter of the child: “...though he may have forgotten his former self, [has he] ever noticed the early, obstinate, and unappeasable inquisitiveness of children upon the subject of origination?” (127). Wordsworth uses a running stream, his own signature trope for poetic origination, voice, and rhythm, in order to express the child’s inseparable correlation of questions of origination and tendency.³⁸ Never, he argues, does the child wonder *whence* without also always wondering *whither*. And since implied in

the “spirit” of any answer must be that the river runs to infinity, the child’s curiosity, unlike the river, flows in both directions – to the *ontos* as well as the *telos*. And for Wordsworth, as the “Immortality Ode” makes clear, origin and tendency answer the same question; the whither and the whence are inextricably entwined: “God, who is our home” is the soul’s one true destination.

Wordsworth does not really explain why a sense of imperishability should necessarily lead to a desire for recognition after death; this would seem to be a secondary narcissism where one might expect precisely an easing of such tension. He concentrates instead on its genesis, claiming that the desire for recognition does not develop until the “*social* feelings have been developed, and the Reason has connected itself with a wide range of objects” (127). “The sense of immortality,” he continues, “if not a coexistent and twin birth of Reason, is among the earliest of her offspring: and we may further assert, that from these conjoined, and under their countenance, the human affections are gradually formed and opened out” (128). Thus, somewhat uncharacteristically for Wordsworth, he claims that, in this account, reason is the factor that precipitates feeling and affection.³⁹ But it is reason twinborn or pregnant with a sense of immortality. The schema looks something like this:



This diagram shows that, consonant with a whole body of recent criticism, Wordsworth’s model of creativity, spirituality, and development (i.e., that which is

most prized) is something that occurs prior to and in the absence of any connection to the social or familial. (As we will see, the figure of the mother and babe, as the quintessential subject/object pair, complicates this picture somewhat.) Yet perhaps we can also glimpse within this schema a corrective measure freeing reason from its limited role, within idealist philosophy, of abolishing the natural state (Schiller 29). Reason in this model need not be antagonistic to intuition. For if reason is “twinborn” with the very faculty of the visionary gleam, which apparels nature in celestial light, then it is indeed a form of intuitive intellection. Thus, Wordsworth’s revisioning of reason opens up the possibility of a childhood space accessible to pure physical intuition (via memory traces or intimations of immortality), while at the same time suggesting that rationality *participates* with intimations of immortality, an organic flowering within the child of knowledge and sense.⁴⁰

Kristeva points to a related political significance, a displacement from political literary content to political literary form, which is embedded in the very structure of semiotic poetic language. Granted, the semiological intervention she imagines relies on a more modernist (surrealist) or experimental language than the language of Wordsworth’s ode. But what connects the two conceptions is that the very possibility of a kind of speech, freed from the homogeneity of the semantic or symbolic realm, is posited here by Wordsworth as a space, a *being*, a rhythm, rather than a linguistic structure. It is also true of course that recourse to the eternal can be, and has been, used as an idealistic rhetorical tool by apologists for the status quo.⁴¹ But when read as a description of reverberative poetics, Wordsworth’s renovation drives a form of reason into the sensual, without the need for Kantian concepts, as a

position rather than a stage. This, to me, is the source of its profound uniqueness. In some ways, Wordsworth's uniqueness was of *and* before its time. By seeking to allow an intuitive or pre-conceptual form of reason for and in the child, Wordsworth proleptically allies himself with Hegel and Walter Benjamin.⁴²

Wordsworth also hints at a darker aspect perhaps impelling our intimations of eternity. Immortality not only guarantees desire and social affections, it also "counterbalances" the "impression and sense of death" (128). "Were we," says Wordsworth, "to grow up unfostered by this genial warmth, a frost would chill the spirit, so penetrating and powerful, that there could be no motions of the life of love; and infinitely less could we have any wish to be remembered after we had passed away from a world in which each man had moved about like a shadow" (129). Paradoxically, Wordsworth's reasoning is deeply Kantian here. Logical necessity insists on a sense of immortality, felt perhaps, but more importantly, deduced and inferred by a retrospective, remembered, analysis of the self. Wordsworth's transcendental logic is, of course, similar to, if not identical with, that which drives the arguments and epistemology of the Ode. And, it is (again) characteristic of Wordsworth to contradict his own assertions. But beyond that, we have the stark fact that at the very beginning of an essay on epitaphs (that is, on death), Wordsworth defensively interposes immortality, purchased by the remembered proof-text of the child, firmly between his current text and the "chill" of death's penetrating power.

Wordsworth's metaphor of the child at the stream, passes over, much like the narration of the obtuse inquisitors in "We are Seven," or "Anecdote for Fathers," the possibility that anxiety about death might prompt the child's questioning of the river's

origin. Wordsworth brings forward this fear of death only in the negative, as a frost that would chill the spirit if the intimations of immortality were gone. Later in the essay, in describing the first requisite of epitaphs (that the language should sink into the heart), he locates “the two points in which all men feel themselves to be in absolute coincidence,” birth, and death (136). Knowing Wordsworth’s distaste for and disorientation within cities, his own anxiety about death, ghosts, impermanence, or finality may then be plausibly inferred through his analogy of the churchyard with “a town of crowded population” (133). The circularity of “absolute coincidence” repeats itself at the end of the third essay on epitaphs, in which Wordsworth cites his final examples of “specimens such as are ordinarily found in our country churchyards at the day.” The examples move from epitaphs of an eighty-seven year old to an eighty-three year old to a three month old and finally to a 10 week old infant. The infant’s epitaph closes the circularity as a perfect couplet: “The Babe was sucking at the breast / When God did call him to his rest” (186). It is impossible to miss the perfect symmetry of “Babe” and “God” in the first position of the lines, and the prepositions “at” and “to” in the third. The cadence is that of a church hymn, while the oral (and oracular) echo of “suck” and “call” recapitulates the infant’s lifespan, its “development,” in an instant. The inverse chronology of examples—from old man to suckling child—happily retrieves for Wordsworth the foundational dyad: on the side of history (the literal coming into being of language and consciousness), mother and child; on the side of eternity (the literal taking back into spirit that which had become flesh), God and spirit.⁴³

Having come this far only to wind up with a somewhat darker, ghostlier, version the Wordsworthian blessed babe, I want to turn from the sentiment and self-referential lyricism to comment briefly on the very material and concrete objects Wordsworth is describing—not the epitaphs per se, but the gravestones, the country churchyards. So much of the contemporaneous discourse of the child in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focuses on the child as both a figure for what is internal to the self, as a kind of ur-figure of interiority.

The modern concept of the self – which took shape throughout the nineteenth century and was formalized in early twentieth-century psychoanalysis – is grounded in a distinctive view of childhood as the depths of historicity within individuals. Childhood is entangled with the adult’s present identity because the interiorized self, the sense of a self within, is perceived as internalized memory of the past, the outcome of a personal history. (Benzaquién 36)

Far from wanting to deny or distance myself from this view, I’d like to see how Wordsworth’s conception of experience and immortality complicates this picture, not by giving it depth (I was tempted when typing just now to write “death”), but by strangely flattening it out, by spatializing it.

As I indicate in my introduction, the change that I am trying to ring on the grand narrative of Romanticism has to do precisely with this flattening out. M. H. Abrams, in *Natural Supernaturalism* writes of Schiller’s Universal History as attaining the shape of a spiral.⁴⁴ Taking the reader through an overview of the biblical-recaptitulist philosophies of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller, Abrams shows how a narrative develops whereby the individual, as well as the collective, move (through the processes of a fortunate fall) from innocence/instinct into reason. Once we move through the subsequent historical and individual stages, we will be able to effect a

return. But this return will not be circular, as in previous Platonic/Christian forms, but rather in a spiral, where the return is a return with a difference, i.e., at a higher level. Reasoned innocence or instinct thus comes (for the first time) into the world. But it only arrives through suffering and hard (aesthetic/philosophical) work. Wordsworth's theory of immortality, as we will see, functions differently. In his model, a kind of reason is "twinborn" with instinct and immediate experience. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting a return to forms of Christian Platonism; rather, I am aiming at a reading infancy and childhood (via Wordsworth, Arnold, and Mill) that is non-productivist and non-redemptive. In order to do this, I will need to re-invoke the discourse of object relations theory, first to connect it to the schema that Wordsworth himself outlines in the first "Upon Epitaphs," secondly to ascribe an alternate anti-depth model to the poetic relation to the child, and then finally to drive these readings back into my overall critique and reception history of the "Immortality Ode," bringing forward a provisional theory of the poetic child, one that further connects to a theory of poetic and political practice.

Part 2: A Wide Range of Objects

The traditional (Freudian) psychoanalytic narrative has it that ego growth happens largely by repression. What we have repressed, or lost, is returned to us via signs or messages from the unconscious. Another way to say this is that the narrative of the ego can be written as the movement of the drives from the pleasure/pain principle, in which the child cannot tolerate frustration of desire, through the modifications of sublimation and repression, and finally to the mature state of the reality principle, in which compensatory objects take the place of unavailable, socially unacceptable, or

lost ones. Object relations theory, expands this narrative, initiated by suggestions (intimations) in Freud's own thought, and suggests that there is another process whereby a kind of splitting happens in the ego. Unwanted fragments of the self are projected onto other people or things. Some accounts of splitting vs. repression, such as W.S. Bion's, see the former as constitutive of psychosis, where the latter happens both in so-called normal functioning and in cases of neurosis. Melanie Klein extended/revised Freud's theory of stages of psychic growth by suggesting that we occupy "positions," such as the depressive position, the paranoid-schizoid position, etc. It is generally agreed that it is from the depressive position that this splitting of the ego occurs. Another concern of object relations theory has been the conception of a "good-enough mother," the point being that the child arrives hardwired for interaction with the mother (as a primary object). Anxieties and fears during this (omnipotent) position must be managed well (mirrored) by the mother in order to assure a healthy ability to interact with and experience the real world.

I am tracing out these conceptions in order to point to three revisions of traditional psychoanalytic practice that I believe to be useful to thinking about Wordsworth's poetics and his conceptions of the poetic child – *splitting, position, and transition* (although I introduce them here I'll return to them all later in the chapter).

A) Splitting: Splitting is a complicated concept in psychoanalytic thought. One variant is the Kleinian version, an essential process of allowing the infant to come nearer and nearer to the "real."

...in the earliest phase the persecuting and the good objects (breasts) are kept wide apart in the child's mind. When, along with the introjection of the whole and real object, they come closer together, the ego has over and over again recourse to that mechanism – so

important for the development of the relations to objects – namely, a splitting of its imagos into loved and hated, that is to say into good and dangerous ones. (The Selected Melanie Klein 143)

The splitting of imagos in the “Intimations Ode” is acute. Ambivalence has tipped into aggressivity and the Mother-figures (rather than actual mothers) are disparaged from the start:

And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Similarly, Arnold’s Gipsy Child poem (discussed below) displays many features of Kleinian projective identification, in which the ego splits off and expels parts of itself into the outer world (183):

Glooms that go deep as thine I have not known:
Moods of fantastic sadness, nothing worth.
Thy sorrow and thy calmness are thine own:
Glooms that enhance and glorify this earth. 17-20

The glooms become distanced from the speaker, and even from the Gipsy child, shunted further and further out onto nature. As I will argue in my conclusion to this chapter, Freud’s inchoate description of splitting comes closest to describing a part of what I think is happening in Wordsworth’s Ode, and to which Arnold responds so vigorously (and gloomily) in his poetry. (Freud’s understanding of splitting is further conceptualized by Lacan as a form of intersection or product—at the joint of subjectivity/being and the other/meaning—the place where the two coincide. It is here that transference happens. To make a choice, says Lacan leaning on Hegel, is to

be forced to make a lethal choice (The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 212, 13). These conceptualizations of splitting, when taken together, offer a model of altered or de-subjectivity that complicates the Hegelian model of the aesthetic. In other words, by choosing not to choose, poems/poets/subjects/children refuse to participate in either the objective or the subjective form of spirit (Hegel 88-90). Poems and poetic subjectivity happen in the interstices, that is, within a split space. This space may also be conceived as the aesthetic space of the poem on the page or the analytic space in which of tranference and counter-transference interact.⁴⁵

B) Positionality: The Kleinian concept of “position”—as opposed to Freudian “stages”—allows for a freer movement between states or modes of being. I have already brought forward the concept of position in the form of Giorgio Agamben’s philosophical positing of the semiotic as a transcendental limit. Kristeva also uses the concept of position to argue for a semiotic state, similar to Agamben’s, something she calls, via Plato, the chora. Kristeva, borrowing from and blending the discourses of philosophy, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, imagines that the chora is not organized according to a “law (a term we reserve for the symbolic) but through an *ordering*.” For her, as for Agamben, language is a marker for experience, but not *only* the linguistic:

‘Concrete operations’ precede the acquisition of language, and organize preverbal semiotic space according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language. From their [i.e. psycholinguists’] research we shall retain not the principle of an operational state but that of a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonist of family structure. (Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language 27)

What I attempt to flesh out in the final section of this chapter is the possibility that, taken together with some of the other features of Wordsworth's aesthetics, positionality might represent a component of what Isobel Armstrong terms a "radical aesthetic," an aesthetics of infancy, a poetic and subjective concept that allows for a freer, unhindered and "nonregressive" movement, which Freudian "stages" simply do not allow or imply, and which may complicate some accounts of the *strictly* linguistic fall into the symbolic, if not remove them from the fetishized realm of a universal master code that contemporary critiques of the aesthetic suggest. Again, this aesthetic, an aesthetic of the *instant*, is not one that needs to be "read back into" Wordsworth, but rather one that Wordsworth himself prefigures in the ode ("Can *in a moment* travel thither"), a temporal and spatial *reverberation* (re-sounding), rephrasing, or return.⁴⁶

- C) Transitionality: Perhaps the most useful concept of Object Relations theory, at least to literary criticism, has been the concept of the transitional object. D. W. Winnicott and Christopher Bollas have written extensively about transitional objects and phenomena. Its status as an in-between or liminal state makes it particularly attractive for describing the states of consciousness that literature is so often drawn to represent, what Winnicott calls a "third part of a human being" between inner and outer realities (2). Transitional phenomena exist within the "intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived" (3). Recently, Trauma Theory has been attracted to the concept of transitional phenomena as Geoffrey Hartman's reading of Wordsworth's spots of time in "Reading, Trauma,

Pedagogy” attests.⁴⁷ My intention in the final section of the chapter is to argue for a less traumatic reading of transitionality, one that Arnold’s poetic rephrasing and Mill’s experience of reading Wordsworth offer. Finally, what emerges from a reading of the space of the child as aesthetic dimension is an *ethics* of the playful rationality of the child that opposes itself to enlightenment forms of knowledge acquisition (commodification) and reified thought.

Looking back now over Wordsworth’s own epistemology of immortality as well as the assorted receptions of this model of the child, we can see that these concepts—correctives as I see them for models of a persistent “vertical” or “deep” poetic subjectivity—are largely anticipated in the poetry itself. I see the two discourses (the reception of Wordsworth’s “Ode” and objects relations) as twin articulations, whose hectic counterpoint make for a clearer picture of either and both.⁴⁸

Towards an Ethical Poetics of Infancy: Splitting, Pleasure, Meter, and Horizontality

Returning to the child of Stanza VII (“Hence in a season of fair weather...”), as critics are wont to do means either “nostalgically” or simply, less fitfully (“in a moment travel thither”) returning to the moment before the child “decides” to “con” another part, the moment when the child must decide to enter into what Herbert Marcuse calls the *performance principle* [“the prevailing historical form of the *reality principle*” (32)], or what Kristeva and Lacan term the symbolic, and Agamben and Benveniste the semantic. The critical undecidability of the Ode, as well as Wordsworth’s own ambivalence—again, marked perhaps by the two-year gap in the composition—shows us that his theory of immortality represents not merely the

sublimation of the instincts, including, perhaps especially, the death instinct, so present in the essays on epitaphs, resulting (defensively) in a transcendental deduction of immortality, nor the re-enchantment of the world by idealizing and concretizing infancy, but rather a *refusal to make a choice*. The child, and thus the ethos of the poem, remains half-formed, in transition, so unlike the fleshly child of “We are Seven”; in contrast, the fleshly children in most of Wordsworth’s other poems are usually in close proximity to death. Alan Liu writes in a footnote that perhaps, there never has been a child in Wordsworth’s poetry.⁴⁹ In a sense what Liu is getting at here are the ways in which representations of children in poetry are already always so mediated by the desires and richly signifying structures (what Roland Barthes terms “mythology”) of a reading and writing culture, which is itself immersed in the image-world of the child. From this perspective, it seems quite possible to argue that *all* we have in Wordsworth’s poems are children—or at any rate, the memory of them, their (linguistic, somatic, narrative) traces, their absence, their stories, their fading images, their corpses, their “meanings.” All of which, as Freud would say, amounts to pretty much the same thing. The point being, that when reading Wordsworth—and here I’m foregrounding that ever-present question of Wordsworth’s style—readers are always positioned, *placed* in the position of having to decide.

Arnold, as we have seen, is uncertain whether Wordsworth’s poems have any author at all, much less, a definitive style, an assertion that reads quite easily as critique or the highest of praise, or both (Arnold and Bateson 104,5). Choosing not to choose, or so-called “wise passiveness”⁵⁰ is a maneuver common to the depiction of characters within the *Lyrical Ballads*, but has seldom if ever in my knowledge been

attributed to the child in Wordsworth's "Great Ode." Freud defines the concept of defensively splitting the ego as:

a conflict between the demand of the instinct and the prohibition by reality. But in fact the child takes neither course, or rather he takes both simultaneously, which comes to the same thing. He replies to the conflict with two contrary reactions, both of which are valid and effective. ("Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process" 372, 3)

As we have seen, Kleinian splitting shows the child already managing (via evaluative splitting) her environment, choosing between good and bad objects and differentiating between inside and out.⁵¹ Freud's inchoate concept of splitting, on the other hand, reflects a kind of arrested development—his most extreme example is the fetishist. This allows the child/poet to reject *and* respond to reality. Wordsworth's theory of "natural piety" has recently been put forward by Anne-Lise Francois as consisting of, in part, precisely this "inability to decide or distinguish between singular, definitive reception and the reiterable, habitual experience of being returned to oneself, returned to earth" (56). This split register is, paradoxically, a commonplace for romantic poetry and theories of *bildung*, which Thomas Pfau identifies with the inauguration in the late eighteenth / early nineteenth centuries of a "radically novel type of logic, a figure known [in Hegel] by the shorthand of 'Identity of identity and difference'" (5). It also allows for a refutation of the teleological aims of development proper. If, as Carolyn Steedman has argued, the idea of the child as an interiorized metaphor of the self arises hand-in-glove with the concept of *bildung* and history as a discipline and ideological structure, then Wordsworth's positing of fetishistic splitting at the moment of its incipience both jeopardizes the grand narrative of *bildung* and the child's place in that "unfolding," but it signals a much

more interesting possibility that both realms—experience and reason—can coexist without contradiction.

Consequent to this correlation is a new theory of development that can be read off against Wordsworth's own theory of poetic pleasure, pain, and meter:

Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or meter of the same or similar construction, and indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of meter differing from it so widely—all these imperceptibles make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling *always found intermingled* with the powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. (Wordsworth, Coleridge and Mason 83, my italics)

Metrical language, like intimations of immortality, always seems to come from, to *be*, someplace else. It is *a priori* and intermingled. That the pleasure principle and the reality principle should work themselves out in the aesthetic dimension is no great revelation.⁵² But what does seem new is the insistence that the space of the aesthetic is now the space of the poet/child *and* the remembered, incorporated, originally “overheard” traces of other people, as evidenced in poetic rhythms “previously received.” This aesthetic space is neither the replacement of nor the supplement for the pleasure principle, but rather the space where reality and pleasure, past and present, are intermingled, twinborn. In this transcendental (in Kant's sense, *not* transcendent) aesthetic, the poet occupies the position of the child.

Wordsworth describes such a space in Stanza 7. In terms of the splitting of objects into good objects (fragments of a dream) and bad (dialogues of business and strife), I would call this organization Kleinian: she defines the depressive

position as the moment that the child recognizes that the mother is separate from the self. It is the moment when (Kleinian) splitting begins. But again, I want to curtail the Kleinian moment of aesthetic origin, in favor of the earlier fetishistic splitting in Freud.⁵³ Freud's theory of the fetish gets touched on in the same essay I reference above.

The main thrust of the essay is to show how a splitting in the ego (over and against the widespread assumption of its synthetic qualities) can persist even in the face of the threat of castration. What is particularly strange about this essay is Freud's appreciation for the ingeniousness of splitting. A young boy who will not give up masturbation witnesses a naked woman. In Freud's typical narrative of sublimation, the child will give up masturbation for fear of the castration he assumes afflicted women. But the boy in Freud's case study finds an "artful" way out of the reality principle:

He created a substitute for the penis which he missed in women, that is to say a fetish. In so doing, it is true that he had given the lie to reality, but he had saved his own penis. So long as he was not obliged to acknowledge that women have lost their penis, there was no need for him to believe the threat that had been made against him: he need have no fears for his own penis, so he could proceed with his masturbation undisturbed. 374

Freud takes pains to differentiate this boy from patients that might be labeled psychotic. The difference being that the fetishist does not "imagine" an entirely new penis for the castrated woman, rather he transfers the fear to another part of his body, and thus replaces it.

We might say then that for Wordsworth, there is an aspect of metrical language and experience that is *fetishistic* in nature (it replaces, it orders), semiotic in

that there is signification (consciousness), but not yet within the semantic realm because it precedes or refuses the world of laws, conceptualization, and choice. Wordsworth's concept of the poem in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* describes just such a double position. Remember that poetry (qua poetry) cannot bring permanent relief in the ode: "A timely utterance gave that thought relief." (The self-reflexiveness inherent in the proposition, oft-cited, that the timely utterance is his own does not diminish this circularity; it only shows the ways in which poetry also circulates somatically, psychically, i.e., internally – through rhythms and fragments [objects] that must be managed.) The role of poetry, its practice, is circumscribed and limited (perhaps precisely because it *is labor or work*), whereas the "space" of poetry, its abstracted center, is timeless, rather than "timely"; the discourse and practice of poetry, in other words, belong to that realm of semantic repetition, as if our "whole vocation / Were endless imitation."

Thus poetry itself is also split, recapitulated along the lines, following the "positions," of the child. The child, in the semantic or symbolic stage, enters the world a second time much as the poem does, ordering experience, splitting its objects. Pleasure and pain may well go together in some moral or Christian sense, but also because of the mutability of affect, of phenomenological boundaries, and especially because poetry itself is an "intermingled" and split discourse.

The philosophical implication of Wordsworth's conflation of object, child, and poem is that poetry is has both an internal and an external dimension. It is an internal – i.e. temporalized (in the metrical sense of being cadence—marked by time, and again, following Kant's distinction between the forms of pure intuition, space and

time, time belonging to the internal world and space to the external) discourse that is also externalized (i.e., projected into space) in its received (i.e., un-worked-on) material as well as its communicative function.

The conflation of poet and child is reinforced by a common 19th and 20th-century aesthetic discourse of the “soul,” not only that which has sight of the immortal sea [see above], but that which serves as a receptacle for objects. Arnold, writing again on Thomas Gray states the “language of genuine poetry...is the language of composing with the eye on the object; its evolution is that of a thing which has been plunged in the poet’s soul until it comes forth naturally and necessarily” (*Essays* 149). This swallowing and spewing forth of objects is commonplace in the discourse of object relations theory. But my main purpose in bringing it forward here is to take note of how corrective Arnold’s exposition of “soul” is for my reading of stanza VII of the ode. We see then that the poet is truly split even insofar as the “soul” of the poet is like the womb or incubator for the object. Wordsworth’s driving together of soul and eye (“our souls have sight...”) imagines *and* complicates that internal space that Freudian splitting implies and underwrites. The complication comes from the opposition and synthesis of a sensual faculty (sight) from a conceptual realm (the soul); Wordsworth calls this in-between location immortality or an “intermediate thought” (D. W. Winnicott calls this an “*intermediate area*”). Wordsworth had already introduced the conceit at the beginning of the stanza: “Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie / Thy Soul's immensity;” (110). If what the child and poet represent in this vision is a non-productive, or non-conformist paradigm, or rather a choosing not to choose, then the

soul's immensity reflects both the active reality *and* the active life of instinct or pleasure. What Arnold brings adventitiously to Wordsworth is the metaphor of depth: a "thing" which has been plunged. It could be that imputing this model of depth to the poet's "soul" is precisely Arnold's source of contention with Wordsworth. What should be "inside" in Wordsworth is displaced onto other places, feelings, origins: "The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar" (60-62).

Finally I want to put pressure on Wordsworth's flattening, his spatiality of infancy, and ask whether or not this uncanny indetermination has any relation to the question of aesthetics or style. The psychoanalyst Andre Green makes the all-important distinction between the models of repression/depth and splitting/surface:

In repression the relationship between the ego as representative of reality and the instinctive demands as representative of pleasure is vertical. Repression dominates the instinctive impulse by pushing it down towards the depth, while the instinctual impulse pushes in the opposite direction towards the top. The unconscious is underground in relationship to the conscious. In splitting the relationship is horizontal; the reason of the ego and the reason of the instinctive demands coexist in the same psychic space. (25)

Here we have a direct analogue to Wordsworth's theory of immortality brought forward in the first "Upon Epitaphs" as well as a map of the theory of infancy that helps make sense of Wordsworth's spatialization in the elusive stanza 7. Green goes on to describe the ramifications for these dual, horizontalized forms of reason in the process of analysis:

A coexistence such as this constitutes a stagnation factor when it takes place during the analytic cure. It is as though the analysand only hears

the analyst's interpretations with one ear. The other ear continues to let itself be rocked and cradled by the instinctual impulse mermaid song, completely ignoring the message received by the other ear. The two logics are in contradiction with one another. There is a refusal to choose any of the items. (25, 6)

This refusal to choose seems to correspond to an aesthetic dimension of the child that is available at any point, vis-à-vis memory presumably, but also by internal sight, not because the dimension of childhood/immortality/feeling has been repressed, but—and here of course I'm synaesthesiastically troping Green—because it has never left our sight: one eye is always on its object (remember Arnold's poetic dictum). And yet, because of the mechanisms of splitting, this cannot be said to be melancholic.

Surfaces replace depths.

Splitting seems to further correspond to Wordsworth's own supposed neo-Platonism in the *Ode*. For if we correct for Green's more narrow interpretation of Freud, remembering that Freud left open the possibility that the child could choose *both* reality and pleasure—he claimed that choosing both or neither were [theoretically] the same thing—then Wordsworth's memories recounted in the Fenwick note about the *Ode* take on renewed significance:

Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being...not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me...with a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. (Wordsworth and Curtis 61)

While much has been made of Wordsworth's grasping (as a form of reality testing, etc. see Hartman), it seems important to me that a recollection of self does not recall the child to its own body, but rather to the soul extensa: the tree, the wall. My point is that while Wordsworth adopts a rhetoric of depth (spirit within me), what happens in the passage is primarily, if not completely, spatial – that is, horizontal as opposed to vertical. The realms of poetry and adulthood are compromised positions. But the realm of childhood, with its split, fetishistic, recalcitrant core, remains available, half-seen, half-glimpsed, half-fleshed out. Tangentially, it seems to me that Freudian (ambivalent) splitting, allows for a reading of Wordsworth's isolation (Yousef, Johnson, Levinson) that is not a matter of repressing the presence of others in favor of a solipsistic aloneness, but rather a refusal to make a choice between an auto-erotic world of poetic pleasure and the "real" world of other people, poetic practice and reception.

Position Rather than Origin

Arnold's claim in "Youth of Nature" amounts to the view that nature (i.e., the symbolic) is always already speaking. Place speaks. Poets only record. Arnold is not altogether sanguine about this concept, however. Gloom replaces glory as the state of the infant child in "The Gipsy Child," and by mutual identification, the poet. Mill's therapeutic approach to the "place" of poetry, on the other hand, seems less fraught and gloomy, less reliant on "original" speech. Similarly, his famous definition of poetry as *over-heard speech* corresponds figuratively to this sense of being positioned. Mill's dialogism, to the extent that it truly "recognizes another," although highly contradictory, is sensitive to the ways that the poet *positions* herself

vis-à-vis other people; while poetry is “overheard,” poetry is also “of the nature of soliloquy...What we have said to ourselves, we may tell to others afterwards; what we have said or done in solitude, we may voluntarily reproduce when we know that other eyes are upon us” (349). The theatricality of this stage direction for poetic utterance though has a limit:

But when he turns round and addresses himself to another person; when the act of utterance is not itself is not itself the end, but a means to an end—viz. by the feelings he himself expresses, to work upon the feelings, or upon the belief, or the will, of another,—when the expression of this emotions, or of his thoughts tinged by his emotions, is tinged also by that purpose, by that desire of making an impression upon another mind, then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence. (349)

Clearly, this passage shows Mill ventriloquizing Wordsworth (the preface itself perhaps “tinged” with Kant’s metaphysics of morals, insisting on ends rather than means). My specific interest is in Mill’s use of spatial metaphors: “*turns round and addresses himself,*” and the dramatic (almost melodramatic) stage direction implied by “overhearing.” Disinterestedness takes the form of an asymmetrical fit between *expression* and *impression*. I am driving at the possibility that these metaphors of space and surface disconnect are attempts to separate out poetry (to protect it) from the totalizing drives of psychic and economic structures.⁵⁴

I have been stressing the repeated necessity of recognizing the contingent and fluid nature of these processes, as opposed to placing an autogenesis (an essential drive) at the center of its development. But I think it would be wrong to say that splitting or position gives us a coming-into-being without impulsion (cultural/societal or biological). Rather, what Klein’s revision of stages into positions gives us is a recognition of the “intermingling” of forces: immortality and death, particular and

universal, genuine (i.e., “overheard” or “feeling”) poetry and eloquence.

Reverberative poetics suggests that “returns” to origin are always partial and fraught. And, as I have already suggested, the gap is filled (mediated, sutured, obscured) by the figure, the idea, and the space of the child. Position merely makes visible the possibility of a slowing of reverberation, not to the point return without remainder, but to the point of affect—that is, pain or pleasure, estrangement or comfort. If, as Juliet Mitchell writes, it is “an always available state, not something one passes through” (116), then I suggest it can only be glimpsed, as Wordsworth suggests, “for a moment.” André Green further suggests that Klein’s “depressive” position (the pre-verbal space of the infant) has, as Wordsworth already intimated, a logic all its own, a logic based in pleasure, which can be accessed and returned to (i.e. recovered) again and again. Furthermore, Wordsworth scholars since Trilling have commented on the almost obsessive association of poetry with pleasure in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. These revisions and correlations point back to eighteenth-century theories of poetics and the origin of language.⁵⁵ So we have it that to travel “in a moment” to the immortal sea where children play, is not merely a return to a form or trope of rejuvenation (i.e., a metaphor as in Wimsatt) or an escape from the “light of common day,” nor is it an always “available state” of pure poetic language, rather it is to be in an ongoing process, to be in a reverb chamber.

By focusing on the status of the poetic space of infancy as a position rather than a stage, stanza VII avoids attaching a biological, organicist determination for the child, the subject, the poet. In contrast, Mill’s speeches in favor of Wordsworth’s poetry of feeling over and against Byron’s eloquence point up the danger and

ideological nature of such a belief⁵⁶—not to mention, the already-remarked function of “replacement” in Mill’s “use” of Wordsworth, whereby the “decay” of feelings (animal feelings of youthfulness, presumably not experienced by Mill) can be replaced by others as a form of bourgeois consolation. Mill’s experience is much more of a stage-ist account, analogous to Schiller’s return, but triangulated through the poetry of Wordsworth. As such, it inscribes a dividing line not only in the history of the child, but also between producer and consumer of experience.⁵⁷ No doubt these are real limits to Mill’s Wordsworthianism (sentimentalized, following the basic logic of production and consumption, etc.).

Even so, the concept of position may be of some help here—if not with Mill’s mystification, than with Arnold’s skeptical refusal. Although it may not produce a way around this problematic, it may at least suggest a deeper reading of the “Ode” and of Arnold’s ambivalent response. As I have already suggested, Arnold’s peripatetic identifications with the child in “Gipsy Child” might be seen not only as a critique of the Wordsworthian child (a critique because although the child can be represented [i.e., accessed] through a multiplicity of identifications and similes, gloom has overtaken pleasure – there is no pleasure in language, the child does not speak), but also as a partial though logical (poetic/formal) extension of the concept of positioning. In other words, a return to the pleasure of language, which is neither vertical nor progressive (i.e., a “working through”) but rather a horizontal (through the mechanism of a non-repressive splitting and the concept of position) traversal, allows for a fuller more contingent concept of experience, and one that does not need to be posited as either “pre-linguistic” or fixed into stages. Arnold’s fixation with the

gipsy child (unmoored, not “subjected” in the Hegelian sense) stutters on the brink of recognition. Following Agamben and Kristeva, the Gipsy child occupies the realm of the semiotic. Thus, as Louis Althusser insists in *Writings on Psychoanalysis*, the family milieu, the ideological structures always already surround the child/poet, but a certain amount of autonomy (choosing *not* to speak) *is* granted to the child due to its preverbal, non-masterful state.⁵⁸

Wordsworth’s theory of immortality, Kristeva’s model of the pre-thetic “chora,” and Agamben’s transcendental infancy, when taken together and read as Kleinian “positions” rather than stages, constitute an open poetics of infancy. That is, they do not “inscribe a dividing line” within the child’s development, and, more importantly it seems to me, they *shift the focus from language* and its failures to the *question of experience* and the possibility for its attainment and (poetic) articulation. In this model, the child replaces the freakish, aphasiatic figure of alterity. In proposing this, I am suggesting a move away from modes of language-centered critique, where a loss of meaning (inherent in the structure of language) recapitulates the romantic thematic of development, with its so-called “fortunate fall.” I am further suggesting that the space of the child/poet (aesthetic, pleasurable, semiotic [filled with “natural sounds”], always-already populated, horizontal, split and accessible for return, [let’s not forget Lyotard’s “miserable”]) presents a much more complex, productive, and interesting model of subjectivity from which to work. It need not be de-historicized or de-historicizing. Also, it gets us beyond the concept of melancholy, which has driven so much of the recent scholarship on Romanticism and subjectivity.⁵⁹

A Non-Traumatic Space

One of the best interpreters of the relation between the aesthetic dimension and the transitional object or phenomenon is psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas:

Thus, the first human aesthetic passes into the idiom of formal aesthetics, as the mother's aesthetic of care passes through her tongue, from cooing, mirror-uttering, singing, story telling and wording into language...Our internal world is transformed by the mother's unconscious desire into a primary theme of being with her that will affect all future ways of being with the other. (35)

Aside from the focus on the musicality of language and the ways in which it circulates, or "passes" down or over or through (an obsession with Wordsworth in books I and II of *The Prelude*), what this passage illustrates is the translation from the "human" aesthetic to the "formal." For many critics, this focus on the aestheticization of primal scene is the greatest strength of the concept of transitional phenomena. But there are other revisions of classical psychoanalytic theory evident in the passage. For example, anyone who speaks of a desire emanating from someone or someplace other than the child's psyche returns us immediately to Freud's abandoned seduction theory, and in the words of Laplanche, the recognition of the other within the other.⁶⁰ All of this is to say that Winnicott and Bollas offer us something closer to an *inter-subjectivity*, a (social, familial, cultural) circuitry that is not solved for entirely on one side, or closed.

Thus critics seeking to address the problem of the relation of aesthetic theory to dominant forms of ideology have looked to Winnicott in order to ground explorations into the relation of different forms and levels of aesthetic experience. In chapter one of her book *The Radical Aesthetic* Isobel Armstrong seeks to correct for what she sees as an over-emphasis on the ideology of the aesthetic in Eagleton and a

“fear” of metaphor in de Man. Together, she says, they constitute a knee-jerk reaction to the problems of aesthetic production and critique. She uses transitional phenomenon and play to suggest a new relation to the aesthetic (39). (Later she posits affect over symbol, pitting Green and Bion against Lacan.) The transitional object helps because it comes between the realms of mother’s body (pleasure) and other people (reality), and because it does not fetishize the mother’s body. In other words, it is non-masculine and non-violent – unlike, according to Armstrong countering Eagleton, Kant’s third critique.

Since my interest in this dissertation is in *the ways in which adults conceive of poetic infancy*, and not what actual (or even represented) children experience, it requires a shift away from the focus of transitional phenomena operating within “primal scenes.” I move then, at the end of my chapter, towards a reading of, on the one hand, the tropes of the theory of transitional phenomena itself (inbetweenness, destruction, contingency), and on the other, the uses to which transitional phenomena have been put in British nineteenth-century poetry criticism, primarily reading scenes of transitional phenomena in poems and interpreting them as signs of trauma.

Winnicott conceives of the transitional space as an “*intermediate area...between creativity and objective perception based on reality-testing*” (11 – italics in original). Remember that in “Upon Epitaphs” Wordsworth posits the intimations of immortality as an “intermediate” space in the development of a child. The intermediate area in Winnicott, to the degree it resembles the aesthetic dimension, is a space in which the child cannot yet conceive of (or, at least the full range of) external reality. Following the “Blessed Babe” passage in *The Prelude*,

Wordsworth tells us that “infant sensibility” has been “augmented and sustained” in him, presumably in a unique way that the rest of us do not share. This sustained augmentation helps to explain how we might conceive of transitional phenomena, which, as Winnicott tells us, precede reality testing. What I am describing is a poetic space and (childlike) mode of existence that experiences imagined or fantasized events and people *as if they were real*, as well as experiencing reality, or, as Coleridge writes, to “carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar” (*The Friend*). Wordsworth further claims that a poet possesses a “disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present, an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events” (71). Not only does the transitional state allow for such second-order or imaginative experience, but according to Winnicott, healthy development throughout the life of the individual depends on it: “It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience (cf. Riviere, 1936) which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.)” (13). This inbetweenness may be the poet’s role (see 1802 Preface 70-71), but I have also claimed it to be the role of the child, at least as it is imagined or conceived of by the adult poet.

But it is not enough to simply be in relation to the object. A successful transitional phenomenon according to Winnicott requires that the object is *used* as

well as *related to*. To use an object is to destroy it, and yet the object must *survive* this destruction (90). In fact, the child must undergo certain processes for transitional phenomena to occur: 1) she must cathect the object; 2) she must place the object outside of “omnipotent control” (thus destroying the object); and 3) the object must survive and not retaliate (94). This (again) is an externalizing factor, or put another way, the entrance of the object *and* subject into the reality principle. This destructive aspect of transitional phenomena is exhibited in Wordsworth’s poetry when the poet leaves a location and returns to find it still there (“still” being a multi-valenced and complex term for Wordsworth: “Therefore am I *still*⁶¹”). Nature and poet survive destruction.

Alan Liu, in a recent unpublished manuscript presented at NASSR, focuses on the destructive element in Wordsworth’s theory of creativity. He juxtaposes this element (which he calls predation) against what he calls prestation or (the giving and receiving of gifts). Again, it is easy, perhaps too easy, to see the ways in which Wordsworth *uses* (destroys) and *relates to* (preserves) nature. My interests in the destructive powers of childhood and poetry also have to do with their transgressive potentialities. The rebellious spirit, “acting in a devious mood” (1805, 2.371-95) is well known to readers of *The Prelude*, but traditional poetry criticism has tended to argue that its spirit is seldom felt or present in the poetry. I would suggest that more often than not, it is the *form of the poetry itself* that is transgressive and destructive, its style (or lack thereof), its subject matter and diction. Its particularity, its inability to be universalized, its passivity suggest a kind of open transitional poetic space, so that what we observe in Wordsworth is a kind of continual, recurrent recathecting of

the object, a stuttering process of letting it go, a form of *transitional phenomena will no beginning and no end*.

Aside from readings of transitional objects within the poems (Plotz), the other locus of Winnicott in poetry studies seems to be within the field of Trauma Studies. I have written above about how Hartman's uses of Winnicott to describe how trauma happens when the child is left too long by the mother. Hartman juxtaposes Winnicott to Lacan to show what a more productive and simpler model the transitional object or phenomenon is when compared to the entrance into the symbolic order. What Hartman doesn't say is that Winnicott de-essentializes Lacan, or at least leaves a (hopeful) door open for the work of contingency. With Lacan, the symbolic order is a given, an inevitable fall from grace; with Winnicott, if you have a "good-enough mother," you can "transition" into healthy object relations and usage. A problem arises from Hartman's reading however; he uses Winnicott's theory to explain trauma vis-à-vis Wordsworth's spots of time. Therefore, what he is constrained to describe in his footnote is a failed transitional experience. The failure in and of itself is not problematic – a flickering transitionality, I have argued, is essential to Wordsworth's poetic practice. But my concern is whether trauma theory can ever be articulated without a melancholic object at its core. Transitional phenomena, contrastively, occur at the edges of the self, the boundary between self and other. This externality suggests that melancholic trauma will necessarily doom any transitional (aesthetic) project from the start. Certainly, this is Hartman's point, that trauma arrests transitional phenomena. But then, what does that say about the poems and the poetic childhood at their center? They are *a priori* (i.e., necessarily) lodged deep within us,

only available to us through the “work” of normalization, through an adaptation to the reality principle, through promises of compensation.

Over and against Hartman’s depth model of traumatic poetry, of “spots of time,” I’ve been trying to tell the tale of a non-melancholic space of the child, one that does not “take in” or incorporate experience but simply experiences, in a more horizontal arrangement (somewhat like an infant who puts objects in her mouth to know the world; ninety-nine times out of one hundred, they don’t swallow). Put another way, I have been trying to read *loss and recuperation not as objects but as spaces* – “immortality” as a “style” in the sense that Foucault suggests as being indexical of modernity in his essay “What is Enlightenment.” Hartman, that most ethical and exacting of critics, ends the essay I’ve been quoting (“Reading, Trauma, Pedagogy”) by claiming that testimony goes hand in hand with trauma. The close relation of testimony to trauma, makes it seem as though, as a discourse, poetry itself is a traumatized genre, compelled to tell its story out of some deep wound. And perhaps, to some extent, it is. But as deeply ethical as Hartman’s vision is, I still want to resist it in favor of something else. First of all, I worry about this equivalence of poetry with post-traumatic stress syndrome, where the child or poem now becomes compelled to speak, as in some Foucauldian scenario of confession. This interrogation room of the child/poet is the polar opposite of the space of the child I’m attempting to paint. I’ve been trying to envision a poetry that tells things in its own time and way, a riddling child/poet, whose silence, strange, or enigmatic verse might sometimes makes us nervous – something like Arnold’s Gipsy Child. Winnicott

himself is attuned to the need for allowing the reader/patient to arrive at her own interpretations:

It appalls me to think how much deep change I have prevented or delayed in patients...by my personal need to interpret. If only we can wait, the patient arrives at understanding creatively and with immense joy, and I now enjoy this joy more than I used to enjoy the sense of having been clever. (Playing and Reality 86)

This to me seems an equally ethical way to proceed, and not one, I think, with which Hartman would disagree. So I want to conclude by acknowledging a parallel between Winnicott's patient deferral of interpretation and what Anne-Lise Francois has called Wordsworth's "ethos of receptivity toward the natural world" (59). It strikes me that this split description is precisely the space of the child I have been trying to adduce, the poem as an analytic space of transference and reverberation, a fractured and ambivalence space, where interpretations come quietly and of their own accord, a space that does not lie too deep for tears, but is always already there, and here, a space that does not lie too deep for tears, but is available at any time.

¹ See for example Plotz and Douglas.

² See Battan and Wilner.

³ My reasons for choosing the "Immortality Ode" stem in part from Paul Fry's suggestion that what distinguishes the English Romantic Ode (from what Fry terms the hymn, whose intent is to praise or eulogize) is precisely its quality of presentation, the sense in which it calls forth or presents something, not from without, but from within the poet herself. Aside from the ode's own claims to a kind of presentation of the child (Thou best philosopher), I'm also *interested in its oft-cited failure to synthesize child and man, past and present, nature and mind* despite its odal (i.e. dialectical) structure

⁴ Cf. Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the End of Childhood," Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuities, Postmodern Contestations, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

⁵ from the Washington Post online: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/13/AR2006031300813.html>

⁶ Coleridge writes in issue 1 that all of his ideas are "not suggested to me by Books, but forced on me by reflection on my own Being, and Observation of the Ways of those about me, especially of little Children" (5). He then goes on in issue 2 to argue for a separation of private and public moralities: "rarely will I recur to them [politics] except as far as they may happen to be involved in

some point of private morality” (21). Yet nearly every public ill seems to have a private corollary and the child gets brought in as a “proof-text” for the failures of the government.

⁷ I invoke the term “rephrasing” here in Geoffrey Hartman’s specific critical sense, “where the literature comes back, finds its value: the ability to ‘rephrase,’ to think experience and words in tandem, to experience words as well as to word experience” Geoffrey H. Hartman and Daniel T. O’Hara, The Geoffrey Hartman Reader (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).322.

⁸ See Jared R. Curtis, “Mathew Arnold’s Wordsworth: The Tinker Tinkered,” The Mind in Creation: Essays on English Romantic Literature in Honour of Ross G. Woodman, ed. J. Douglas Kneale (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1992).44-57.

⁹ Marjorie Levinson, in *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* suggests a central differences between the child in the *Lyrical Ballads* and the Pindaric or odal child Marjorie Levinson, Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems : Four Essays (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York Cambridge University Press, 1986).96, 97.

¹⁰ While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I see a tendency to set up an opposition between child/childhood/memory as a place of possibility for rebirth or creative work (i.e. overcoming or compensating loss) and child/childhood/memory as merely the location and remainder of that loss. In terms of 20th century American poetry, Bishop and Duncan fall into the former category, whereas Eliot and Berryman fall into the latter.

¹¹ See Kelley for the problem of the particular in 19th-century poetry. Her article reads this problem primarily through Adorno: Theresa M. Kelley, “Romantic Nature Bites Back: Adorno and Romantic Natural History,” (Routledge, 2004), vol. 15..

¹² Think of Blake’s “Infant Joy,” Baille’s “A Mother to her Waking Infant,” Byron’s address to Ada book-ending Canto III of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Coleridge’s “Frost and Midnight” and “Nightingale: an Ode,” or Wordsworth’s own “The Blessed by the Babe” passage from *The Prelude*.

¹³ See *The Function of Criticism in the Present Time* for Arnold’s insistence that philosophy/criticism must be always kept separate from poetry: “for creative literary genius does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas, that is rather the business of the philosopher. The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery...” (237).

¹⁴ For Hegel’s the reconciliation of particular and universal, which is exemplified in the person of Christ, see his Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics 77.

For Arnold, there is no organic unity (between content and form, or between particular and universal) as we find in Coleridge. In this sense, Arnold indeed recognizes the historicist imperative: see “Function of Criticism” 238. Criticism’s job is to bring the moment/idea/epoch to fruition; the poet’s job is to express it. See also the preface to Wordsworth’s collection pg. 343.

¹⁵ “Was it for this / That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved / To blend his murmurs with my nurse’s song...sent a voice / That flowed along my dreams?” (*Prelude* 1805, lns. 269 – 274).

¹⁶ Coleridge insists that that the “best philosopher” should correspond to received or current conceptualizations of philosophy: “In what sense is a child of that age a *philosopher*? In what sense does he *read* ‘the eternal deep’ ...by reflection? by knowledge? by conscious intuition? or by *any* form of modification of consciousness?” (7, II: 138).

¹⁷ For an overview of the uses of the child in the 18th-century sciences see Benzaquén. For a critique on the ways in which Rousseau and others use the figure of the child to epitomize the transposition of “natural man” to the “I” of common unity, see Nancy Yousef, Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Jerome McGann, in *The Romantic Ideology*, outlines this process famously by considering Romantic poetry through Marx’s “German Ideology” (4-10). For a dissenting view of organicism see Charles Armstrong. For an early canonical critical description, also focusing on Coleridge, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (60-67).

¹⁹ Perhaps there is a way to understand Arnold’s refusal of his own “Empedocles on Etna” on the grounds that it did not offer answers as an attempt to banish the child or the subjective from his own work – see Isobel Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry* (208 –214).

²⁰ Arnold did try in a failed revision to orient the reader and mute the hyperbolic power of the first stanza's questions: "The port lies bright under the August sun, / Gay shine the waters and the cluster'd pier; / Blithely this morn, old Ocean's work is done, And blithely do these sea-birds hover near" (Allott 23).

²¹ Throughout Arnold's poetic corpus, the stoic philosopher as well as the liminal figure of the gypsy occupies a privileged place (e.g. "Thyrsis" and "The Scholar Gypsy").

²² Whereas Arnold could argue for a more historically accurate accounting of the child in Wordsworth's ode, his historicizing project breaks down when it comes to his own poetry and the child: i.e., his inability to recognize or represent the (social, economic, political) conditions that might have produced the pleading eyes of the Gypsy child.

²³ Cf. *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*.

²⁴ See editor's note in Allott, pages 244, 245.

²⁵ cf. Stephen Gill: "There is not a line or an image in 'The Youth of Nature' that enacts, or even speaks of fusion or combination between the mind and the natural world. The poet questions across a gulf and answers return. But the gulf remains and it is in the existence of the gulf that Arnold finds the only kind of consolation possible" (181).

²⁶ Paradoxically, Arnold is able to return the historical dialectic to the work of criticism (see the "Function of Criticism at the Present Time"). It is as though for Arnold the dialectical work of history is itself a condition for dialectical change. When we enter a time of contraction (i.e., a time for criticism rather than poetry), as Arnold believes himself to be in, history itself is evacuated from the poetic realm.

²⁷ Agamben makes explicit the connection between children and ghosts: they are "*the signifiers of the signifying function*, without which there would be neither human time nor history" (84).

²⁸ Arnold's arrested confrontation with, and obsessive projections onto the gypsy child further correspond to encounters with what Walter Benjamin terms a "Fantastic object." The key term here is the "Grotesque"—an important term in the literature of the mid and late nineteenth century. Benjamin claims that the grotesque is the only legitimate form of the fantastic; the imagination cannot dissolve its form so instead it destructively "over-forms" it Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings: Vol 1, 1913-1926 (Cambridge MA; London: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1996), 280.

²⁹ "The state to which I now allude was one / IN which the eye was master of the heart, When that which is in every stage of life / The most despotic of our senses gained / Such strength in me as often held my mind / In absolute dominion. Gladly here, / Entering upon abstruser argument, Whould I endeavour to unfold the means / Which Nature studiously employs to thwart / This tyranny, summons all he senses each / To counteract the other and themselves..." (1805 *Prelude*, 170-80).

³⁰ "He has painted all the successive states of his own mind. 1. the mere animal delights received from the beauties of nature. 2. the decay of those feelings, and their being replace by those others which have been described" (441).

³¹ cf. Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection (New York: Norton, 1977) 2.

³² Isobel Armstrong comments on Arnold's "estranging sea" (VP 228).

³³ For Arnold's concept of the "poetic soul" see his essay on Gray [commented on again below]: "genuine poetry is conceived and compose in the soul" (*Essays* 149). Arnold is comparing Gray here to Dryden and Pope who compose and conceive poetry in their wits.

³⁴ Trilling uses Ferenczi and Freud to speak of a kind of undifferentiated space of the child, and even follows Freud (via *Civilization and its Discontents*) back into the womb of the mother (*LI* 140).

³⁵ Cf. Wimsatt's famous description from "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery" in Bloom 87.

³⁶ Rousseau suggests that children, through the use of facial expressions and gestures, possess a non-verbal language that can be translated and mastered by the care-giver (*Emile* 65). See also Coleridge's claims for a pre-verbal language in "On the origin of the idea of God" in *Opus Maximum*.

³⁷ Interestingly, twentieth-century critics (Wimsatt, Bloom, Hartman, Fry) all seem to focus on the epode. All seem unanimous that the ode does not resolve (Hartman calls pseudo-Pindarics "epiphanic abortions"), yet to my knowledge only Hartman (along w/ Coleridge) identifies stanzas

7 and 8 as the crux of the problem and the poem. Hartman's elegiac and lovely reading seems finally to spin off into fascinating verbal play, and a final formal statement about the ode structure itself: it is a "linguistic monster, sometimes merely a linguistic machine, to liberate or steal back a language that discloses Being" (206).

³⁸ Cf. Guinn Batten, The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English Romanticism (Durham; London: Duke UP, 1998), esp. 149-210.

³⁹ C.f. Wordsworth's claim in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that he was placing sentiment prior to, but not subordinate to, rationality: 62, 63.

⁴⁰ This depiction of "unfolding" departs in ways that are, as is characteristic of Wordsworth, both politically radical and potentially quietistic. In contrast, see Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1965), especially letter number 3: "He comes to himself out of his sensuous slumber, recognizes himself as Man, looks around and finds himself—in the State" (28).

⁴¹ Jameson, in *Marxism and Form*, addresses similar claims leveled at Fredric Schiller. Jameson clarifies Schiller's historical moment, saying that he wrote the *Letters* thinking of a middle class revolution in Germany (90). The gist of his Jameson's question, and one that I think we might benefit by re-asking, is what if our refusal of the kinds of utopian speculation epitomized by Schiller is in fact a symptom of late capitalism? Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

⁴² For Hegel's desire to recapture an intellectual intuition in Kant, see "The Rejection of Kantian Dualism" by Guyer; for a reading of Benjamin's desire to "extend Kant's concept of experience towards an intuitive form of experience" see Linroos (22).

⁴³ See the "Blest be the infant babe" passage (1805 Prelude: II; 232-280)..

⁴⁴ Cf. pages 199-217.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Hegel also describes objective and subjective spirit, insofar as it is in art, in spatial terms. Objective art is classical sculpture—subjective art, that which is "the variously particularized *subjective* existence of the Deity," corresponds to poetry and music. The middle position between them is architecture whose primary purpose is to house objective art. It is thus a "space," a pure form, that "has its spiritual aim and content, not in itself, but in another" Georg Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London; New York: Penguin, 1993) 89.

⁴⁶ See "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (116): "Melanie Klein introduces a concept [position] that presents the moment of ego organization – she substitutes a structural for a developmental notion. This facilitates the making of a connection b/t adult psychosis and infant development – a "position" is an always available state, not something one passes through." It should be noted that Klein initially proposed a more open and inclusive theory of stages only to revise this in her later work.

⁴⁷ This extremely compressed and brilliant essay is almost impossible to paraphrase accurately. In a footnote on trauma and temporality Hartman offers Winnicott's model of transitional phenomena as a simpler [than Lacan's reading of the symbolic] description of the relation between traumatic and symbolic (Reader 297). I should also add that Hartman does have an ethics of (non-traumatic) play at work in a number of essays, most notably "A Question of our Speech."

⁴⁸ Cf Peter L. Rudnytsky, Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces: Literary Uses of D.W. Winnicott, *Psychoanalysis and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Gail M. Newman, Locating the Romantic Subject: Novalis with Winnicott, *Kritik* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Plotz reads Liu's cryptic footnote as meaning that Wordsworth "reifies" the child, putting forth cardboard cutouts of children. It could also be that Liu is commenting on the ways in which the child is subsumed under something like an authoritarian system of the child.

⁵⁰ "Expostulation and Reply": "Nor lest I deem that there are powers, Which of themselves our minds impress, / What we can feed this mind of ours, / In a wise passiveness" (21-24).

⁵¹ Freud's brief paper on splitting far more discursive than Klein's work, contains no case studies, and seems to signal in the direction of the later metapsychological writings. For a discussion of the relative benefits of pure psychoanalytic theory vs. analytic practice, see Althusser's *Writings on Psychoanalysis*, and for a different perspective, one that insists on the necessity that any theory

be strongly grounded in analytic practice, see the introduction to André Green's *On Private Madness*.

⁵² To rewrite the aesthetic space as one safe from the powers of ideological (i.e., market) values, has been the dream not only of romantic and humanist but also of anti-romantic or post-modern thinkers. Cf {Jameson, 1988 #226}vol. II, 64.

⁵³ Briefly, the Freudian model, although it arises out of conflict, is more passive than Klein's and seems to correspond more closely to the moment that Wordsworth theorizes as a twin-birth of intimations of immortality and the onset of rationality.

⁵⁴ My literalization and spatialization of Mill's poetics has a precedent. John Ruskin suggests in the *Praeterita* that the Ode taught him the perils of habituation, by which one grows tired of natural scenes, specific spots or locations. What is needed in order to rekindle the glow or glory is variation of scenery 36.

⁵⁵ Condillac, in part two of the *Essai*, on the 'Origin and Progress of Language,' sketches a history in which 'natural signs,' or 'cries of passion,' are slowly replaced by 'instituted signs,' or 'articulate sounds.' Diderot and Rousseau advanced similar theories, the point being that infancy, especially the preverbal (yet not pre-semiotic: "natural signs") state of the child, is a space that is always already poetic.

⁵⁶ c.f. Timothy J. Wandling, "Early Romantic Theorists and the Fate of Transgressive Eloquence: John Stuart Mill's Response to Byron," *Nervous Reactions: Victorian Recollections of Romanticism*, ed. Joel Faflak; Julia Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004)..

⁵⁷ See Louis Althusser, Olivier Corpet and François Matheron, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). for a relevant critique of inscribing a "dividing line *within* the child's developmental history," which Althusser reads as ideologically motivated and evidence of psychologism. He further develops this critique into an overall critique of the nineteenth-century discourse of *bildung* or development.

⁵⁸ An account such as this has a further advantage, in that it enters into recent debates on the nature of critical discourse and the methodologies and theories of post-structuralism. James Berger's article in a recent PMLA addresses what he terms the "counter-linguistic" turn in theory. According to Berger, its central claim is that "there *is* an other of language, whether or not this other can be conceptualized, and that language does not go 'all the way down'" (334).

⁵⁹ Butler, Batten, Rajan, etc.

⁶⁰ Cf. *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* by Masson, and "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution" in *Essays on Otherness* by Laplanche.

⁶¹ Cf. "Tintern Abbey" (ln. 102). The quite familiar line is, of course, "therefore and I still / a lover of these mountains." The emphasis the word "still" receives because of its enjambment allows it a kind of exemplarity for poetic and phenomenological understandings of memory and experience. It echoes like the memory of the experience – not a screen memory now (Freud claimed that only early childhood memories, unmoored from our tendency to organize our subjectivity around important events, could rightly bear that name), rather a spot of time, which is also a location, and actual "spot."

Chapter 3

“When I First Saw the Child”: from Observation to Aesthetic Theory in Erasmus Darwin and S. T. Coleridge

Coleridge claims in the first issue of *The Friend* that his whole system of beliefs is “not suggested to me by Books, but forced on me by reflection on my own Being, and Observation of the Ways of those about me, especially of little Children” (8).

¹ The general tenor of Coleridge’s “system” in *The Friend*, that is, his political, religious, and aesthetic views, has been commented on thoroughly, usually under the critical rubric of his “romantic ideology.” Yet Coleridge’s claim for an empirical basis² for those views has received little or no attention. Coleridge’s grounds for a causal chain of belief move from books to reflection to observation. The slippage from “reflection,” which for Coleridge would have been produced in a philosophical operation,³ to “observation,” that is, a more immediate and “objective” process, operates so as to accord authenticity and verisimilitude “naturally” to the claims that follow. Children, it seems, at least for the romantic imagination, *are* special, not only for the “immediacy” of their vision or experience, but also because they have not yet been contaminated by the world. They are also, so the story goes, less self-conscious about *being* observed. This chapter explores these connections, slippages, and identifications, putting specific pressure on instances of poetic and philosophical observation of infants and mothers. The mother—infant dyad comes to be an especially rich emblem for arguments about natural progress, development, and

aesthetic taste. In these discourses, baby and mother become the privileged metaphor for the subject—object problem, the object being, following Kant’s “Copernican revolution,” the unreachable yet necessary material world outside our consciousness.

In contrast, for several years now, our own twenty first-century critical discourse has been focused on “things.” It is as though the “object,” that perennial problem and inspiration for poetic and philosophic thought, through being recast as and renamed a thing, has suddenly become more accessible, less difficult, although perhaps not less vague for all the critical effort. Bill Brown’s thing theory conceives of things as what is “excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects” (5). In what follows, I take a different tack. I investigate objects, if for no other reason than that they best describe what I see being worked through and worried over in the texts that I address. But also because objects, notoriously and obsessively, seem to find their way inside us in a way that things—and perhaps this is their attraction for contemporary critics—do not.

My method in this chapter is comparative. Looking at a chapter from Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia*—originally published in 1794—and reading it against another from S. T. Coleridge’s *Opus Maximum*—probably written between 1819 and 1823—I hope to establish a partial genealogy for two competing versions of the aesthetic.⁴ In particular, I show how the originary object in each of these discourses, the maternal body, and more specifically, the breast, becomes the primary figure for ideal beauty,⁵ and also how it serves to mediate between the burgeoning ideal of the liberal individual on the one hand and the increasingly threatening realm of the social on the other.⁶ In order to theorize the relation between these works as well as to track their

own internal arguments, I borrow terms and concepts from recent developments in object relations theory. Translating these representations from the realms of philosophy and poetry to the analytic situation—perhaps due to the psychoanalytic linkage between language, pleasure, and pain—shows more clearly the role of the infant as the *ur*-figure for the poet.⁷ For Coleridge, the infant transforms the world by interpreting its linguistic structures, that is, by ascribing significance to the perceived internal and external movements of the mother. For Darwin, beauty and pleasure go hand in hand. Our tastes are formed for us by nature, by memories inscribed and encoded in each of our senses, which develop, as they do in Coleridge, within the enclosed world of the mother-infant pair. Roughly, these differences can be read as exemplary of Darwin's organicism on the one hand, and Coleridge's theory of the symbol on the other.⁸ I test these aesthetic theories by juxtaposing them, and then by reading short passages of poems by Coleridge and Darwin.

Finally, I question the usefulness of thinking the aesthetic and subject development exclusively through the body, as Darwin does, or exclusively through the symbolic mediation of reason or the soul, as is the tendency in Coleridge. Coleridge's poetry, in particular, provides us with a glimpse of an in-between position, an aesthetics of distance, disorientation and ambivalence. Articulated in the tension between aesthetic theory and poetic practice, this ambivalent aesthetics challenges not only our received theories of romantic subjective and aesthetic manufacture, but it also challenges us to rethink our political and critical attachments to totalizing narratives, no matter if articulated from the left or the right.

Part 1:
Darwin's Organic Infant

Erasmus Darwin, Grandfather of Charles, was already well-known as a physician, an inventor, and a poet by the time he wrote his great work of natural science *Zoonomia; or The Laws of Organic Life*. He conceived of *Zoonomia* as an attempt to consolidate all of his thinking into one comprehensive system, which would “contribute to the interest of society” (I - viii). The section I discuss, titled “Of Instinct,” opens by alternately describing animals and human infants: they swim in the womb; they ingest amniotic fluid; they learn to suck, etc. (101-108). Importantly, for Darwin, human uniqueness is not related to our capacity for language per se, but rather to our visual capacities, our ability to represent.

Our perception of beauty consists in our recognition by the sense of vision of those objects, first which have before inspired our love by the pleasure, which they have afforded to many of our senses...and secondly, which bear any *analogy of form* to such objects. 108

This shift in the passage from what is “agreeable” to what is “beautiful” is precisely the shift from breasts to objects of aesthetic pleasure, from use to exchange, a shift from what is present to what is absent and thus requires another level of representation.⁹ Darwin then goes on to explain both human consciousness and the aesthetic consequences of our sense perceptions through the topos of the nursing mother and infant. The “babe,” once put to the mother’s breast experiences a panoply of sensations, beginning with touch and ending in vision. He writes that:

All these various kinds of pleasure at length become associated with the form of the mother’s breast...And hence at our maturer years, when any object of vision is presented to us, which by its waving or spiral lines bears any similitude to the form of the female bosom, whether it be found in a landscape with soft gradations of rising and

descending surface, or in the forms of some antique vases, or in other works of the pencil or the chisel, we feel a general glow of delight which seems to influence all our senses; and, if the object be not too large, we experience an attraction to embrace it with our arms, and to salute it with our lips, as we did in our early infancy the bosom of our mother. 109

In addition to its oral fixation, what is striking in Darwin's aesthetic account, and this bothered his contemporary Thomas Brown as well, is that there is no acknowledged sense of loss or mourning in the absence of the object (Brown 294-302). In most of our economies of the subject, loss and alienation are important in that they precipitate desire, and, signal retrospectively the importance of the object, all of which authorize and subtend our acts of subjectivization.¹⁰ Loss, memory, distance, difference, in short, the ability to symbolize—these characterize what Melanie Klein terms the depressive position, the ground for all acts of mourning and working through, as well as the ground for acts of creativity (Klein The Selected Melanie Klein 147-48, 89-90).¹¹

Of course, the question of desire is more vexed in western aesthetic theories than it is in theories of psychology. Yet while there is critical disagreement about the precise meaning of Kant's concept of disinterest, surely to place an aesthetic object in one's mouth is an appetitive interest and is thereby disqualified according to the principles of the third critique.¹² Darwin's supremely "untroubled" aesthetic narrative of infancy suggests that the mother's breast serves primarily as a template, after which, presumably, objects of related beauty (curved, shapely, etc.) take its place.

For Darwin, unfulfilled desire can exist only in a dream world of absolute ugliness, or rather, only in a hypothetical world of absolute dissimilarity to the breast,

and because his aesthetic downplays the difference between object and representation, Darwin removes the category of desire from the subject altogether.¹³ This elision of loss and desire has important cultural and societal ramifications. By giving us a primarily oral aesthetic, one that completely side-steps the motive force of desire or ambivalence, Darwin side-steps the need for conceptual growth in the subject, or, importantly, for the corresponding theories of *Bildung* and development that form the core of eighteenth and nineteenth-century liberal thought. Stages and sublimation give way to easily recuperable pleasures. His materialist organicism, the claim that the mind and body function identically (ideas are “animal motions of the organs of sense”), treats breasts and artworks as comprised of similar bundles of sensual information, simply analogous forms (Richardson British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind 12-16). Psychoanalytic theory would say of Darwin’s aesthetics that it is “pre-ambivalent,” insofar as it “does not put an end to the existence of the object” (Abraham 451). The breast, in other words, is not transfigured, but rather merely and magically mimetically reproduced.

In this vein, psychoanalyst and theorist Maria Torok offers a useful and important distinction between fantasies of incorporation and processes of introjection. Typically, introjection is a process which accompanies *growth* in the subject; it uses an object to mediate between the unconscious and the ego (110-124). It is simultaneously an introjection of the object and an introjection of the drives. In contrast, and over and against introjection, incorporation is primarily a fantasy of ingesting the object, and is entirely *compensatory*, not predicative of growth. In a sense, it is a failed introjection. Although I will return to this distinction, I’d like to

suggest that Darwin's aesthetics is *primarily an incorporative theory*. The desire to put art objects into one's mouth (what Abraham and Torok call de-metaphorization) reveals the intense ways in which objects are not introjected ("cast into" the ego) but are rather magically reproduced, swallowed, saved, hidden, disguised in *compensation* for a loss that cannot be named. Although Darwin names (and normalizes) the loss (of the mother's body) in ways that anticipate and even challenge Freud's intervention one hundred years later, he materializes it into a shape, an empty signifier.¹⁴ The love, protection, and care it had come to signify are absent, or rather superfluous.

Critics have suggested that Darwin's use of the mother-child dyad as a backdrop is a consequence of his profession as a physician.¹⁵ It is important to notice that, for Darwin, the faculty of sight is always privileged. He expounds on his aesthetic of visual beauty in a prose interlude in his poem "The Loves of the Plants": according to Darwin abstraction belongs more properly to the prose genre whereas distinct visual objects are best represented in poetry.¹⁶ In *Zoonomia*, Darwin openly credits the visual basis for his aesthetic theory on Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty*. Yet even as Hogarth grounds our aesthetic preferences on the resemblance of wavy or serpentine lines to the human body (he also inscribes certain aesthetic values to infancy), Darwin goes much further, seeing our relation to beauty as primarily a displaced one, where the breast and its primal, sensory pleasures are refracted onto a world of potential echoes, replacements or supplements. I have already commented in chapter one on the relation between infantile and aesthetic pleasure that Wordsworth deems a primary function and result of poetry. Darwin, again, goes

further. His “material psychology” (Reed calls it a “liquid materialism”) gives a detailed “sensorial” account of the twin-birth of consciousness and aesthetics that shows us not only how the processes of infancy *inform* poetic or “creative” acts, but also how aesthetics, like consciousness, is deeply *rooted* in somatic experience.¹⁷ On the one hand, this narrative returns us to a familiar modern and idealizing narrative of intuitive infancy and (pre-lapsarian) subjectivity, one that still runs (in variants) through the discourses of poetry, philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, and psychoanalysis. On the other hand, it suggests a mode of being in the world that denies many of the features of our commonplace understandings of rational and compensatory subject formation. It is at once instinctual *and* externally derived, and thus would seem to be at odds with processes of “individuation,” or concepts of human agency that are brokered on forms of Hegelian alienation. Aesthetics is not then forced into a model of personal development for the subject. There is no “unhappy consciousness,” no residue, nothing left over in the exchange from object to object.

In section three of book one of *Zoonomia*, Darwin argues that all perceptions and ideas of things originate in external stimuli (15). Thus Darwin’s aesthetic theory of development differs from both earlier theories of skeptical empiricism, such as Hume’s, and later romantic theories of organicism and self-development, such as Hegel’s, in that it has as its point of origin a material, external, and wholly other (although human-other) source. Therefore, to the extent therefore that we grant the mother and the babe separate existences, there is no pre-social infant.

In a failed metonymy, the breast stands neither for the mother or the beautiful objects that mimetically come to take its place, but rather for pleasure itself. The story of the human then, like the story of the animal, becomes a story of the body – its pleasures and its drives. Darwin links his theory of the aesthetic to a materialist theory of human love. What separates human (“sentimental”) love from animal love is its capacity to desire, to appreciate beauty. On the one hand Darwin claims that “animal attraction” is love, “a sensation, when the object is present; and a desire, when it is absent” (109). Anticipating other, more alienating, theories of the subject, human consciousness (and love) would seem then to be produced by the gap created by desire, and it is this which marks our “pre-eminence” vis-à-vis other animals. Yet uniquely, for Darwin, love, as aesthetic presence (fulfillment, pleasure, etc.), continues to foreground its own material, sensual aspects. In this way then, Darwin makes animality (sensation, the infantile, the unconscious or id) an integral part of our entire social, aesthetic, and experience.

Returning to the baby at the mother’s breast, we can see that what marks the “original” animal space is that it is primarily *anti-aesthetic*. In other words, there is *no auratic distance or desire, only the space of infant enmeshment with the mother*. Aesthetics, representation or distance, is able to enter in without loss, without a constitutive change. In ways that relate back to chapter one’s discussion of Wordsworth’s theory of immortality, Darwin allows for a form of pure sensation or animality to exist for us not only whenever the “object was present,” but also whenever confronted with beauty. The need for individual mastery over object relations (e.g., Freud’s observation of his grandson and the “fort”-“da” game) is thus

negated by a universal aesthetic of curved or breast-like art, art that is identical to world. There is no need for sublimation or transition, processes whereby the child passes from the illusion of oneness with the mother. There is no “transitional” experience, in Winnicott’s sense. Objects are not destroyed and miraculously saved because there is no fantasy of aggression and no accompanying guilt. Nothing (no thing) is ever transcended in a progressive movement toward “reality” and symbolism. Thus, unlike Hegel’s phenomenology of human consciousness the subject does not transcend the earlier state—there is no need—rather, oral fixations linger, and aesthetic and erotic impulses co-exist. Darwin’s analysis of desire sets all human (erotic) love (the product of desire) in relation to (*and* in contestation with) aesthetic beauty (the product of mimesis). Perhaps it is also accurate to say that it complicates and aestheticizes all erotic (human) desire at the same time as it eroticizes all aesthetic judgment.¹⁸

Darwin’s aesthetic has a postmodern corollary in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome. In the conclusion to their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the variation of “lines” that are available to post-modern subjects (of deterritorialization, of flight, etc.). The first order of lines “is subordinated to the point; the diagonal is subordinated to the horizontal and vertical” (505). The other kind of line – that which Deleuze and Guattari oppose to conventional linearity – is the “rhizome”:

The diagonal frees itself, breaks or twists. The line no longer forms a contour, and instead passes *between* things, *between* points. It belongs to a smooth space. It draws a plane that has no more dimensions than

that which crosses it; therefore the multiplicity it constitutes is no longer subordinated to the One, but takes on a consistency of its own.
505

I will not attempt to explain in detail the theoretical importance (to poetics, politics, or philosophy) of the rhizome. And granted, *A Thousand Plateaus* is not a text about aesthetics per se. Suffice it to say that for Deleuze and Guattari, (aesthetic, political, social, personal) smoothness and rhizomes stand over and against striation and conventional root structures. And, as they point out in the conclusion, rhizomic line and geometrical line mutually imbricate; there can be no possibility of one without the other. My point in bringing this concept forward here is to suggest a close relation between Darwin's breasted world and Deleuze and Guattari's political aesthetics of rhizomic line. Both trade on notions of the body and nature. Both occupy positions of refusal vis-à-vis schematic, unilinear shapes and concepts—that is, the status quo of enlightenment reason. Finally, both aesthetic visions foreground their own roles in mediation: for Darwin, sight mediates all the other senses; for Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of the rhizome is nearly a homonym for kind of nomadic in-between-ness.

Related recent work in bio-engineering and eco-business similarly produces research and products that recapitulate natural shapes, such as the spiral and the wave.¹⁹ These innovations seek to uncover “secrets” in nature (usually figured as “maternal” or earthly) that can restore a balance that unilinear and “masculine” design has disrupted.²⁰ I am not suggesting that E. Darwin should be seen as a proto-ecologist or feminist. Late eighteenth-century industry had no better friend than Erasmus Darwin and the Lunar Society. Rather, what I am suggesting is that

idealistic concepts of original design (aesthetic or industrial) are very much still with us, and that at the heart of such idealisms is a desire to be “back” somewhere, “in” some primary and fulfilling relation.²¹ Furthermore, I am restating my proposition that Darwin’s narrative of infancy and the breast circumvents aspects of traditional Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics and subject development, aspects that have tended to be read as politically regressive.

So far, I have been arguing that for Darwin, the infant occupies a place of complete sensual fulfillment. Its love (which, at this stage, is another word for its pleasure) for the mother precedes its love of beauty (which is activated an absence that seems not to precipitate anxiety or desire). Thus, all post-maternal or non-maternal encountered objects tend to fall into one of two categories; either they are incorporable objects of love and beauty (objects of immediate pleasure), or they are empty, intangible *things* (unable to be incorporated *or* introjected). These latter we have no desire to suck or “salute,” as in an incorporative model. Nor do they act as aides to some process of maturation, shuttling between the ego and the unconscious, as in the introjective aesthetic model I introduce in the section on Coleridge. Darwin’s failure to account for objects that do not yield incorporative pleasure anticipates Coleridge’s dissection of the objective world into responsive and non-responsive forms. As I have suggested, there does not seem to be in Darwin’s aesthetic narrative, as there is in Freud’s narrative of the subject, a crisis of loss and then sublimated recovery; nor is a

Hegelian unhappy consciousness. Beautiful objects are simply *there* to take the place of the maternal body, almost as extensions. Aesthetic consciousness seems to come about completely through the accumulation of supplemental pleasures, and all aesthetic pleasures can be traced back to the same maternal and fleshly source.

In fact, there seems to be no connection between the social and the personal in Darwin's aesthetic. Untroubled, instinctual demands flit from object to object without any residue of "working through," or loss. This is, I believe an accurate description of Darwin's work in natural sciences. Yet, as we will see, the poetry figures forth a different relation of infant to breast (and thus to maternal objects). The pressure that the poetry places on the figure of the feeding infant reveals tiny cracks and fissures in these theories. Another way of stating this is to say that anxiety or desire arises at points of explanation. In book II of *Zoonomia* Darwin only has to account for anxiety or doubt when attempting to explain psychological causes to physiological disorders. Similarly, in *The Botanic Garden*, anxiety occurs at the point of having to create a narrative, to explain social structures and manage poetic tropes in light of his poetic and scientific taxonomy. This points, of course, to a limit in the strictly empirical approach: at what point does the catalogue require explanation?

Thus psychology and the distance of desire creep back in when the subject is socialized. By considering the poetry in the light of Darwin's own theory of disease, as he himself does in one of the interludes in *The Loves of the Plants*, we see that poetry seeks to bring forth the object, to reveal its "ideal presence." My argument is not that this attempt to render forth the aura of the object is any less problematic in terms of the poetry's ideological premises; rather I want to accentuate the *presence* of

the anxiety, to locate it in its historical and cultural specificity, as an ambivalence that continues to adhere in our discourses of infancy, origin, and aesthetic production.

Darwin's Incorporative Poetics

In 1972, perhaps concerned with the extremes (as he saw it) of literary criticism, William Wimsatt wrote that we should refuse the “organicism of the extreme biological analogy” as well as that of the “*a priori* or transcendental absolute” in favor of a “homelier and humbler sort of organicism...empirical, tentative, analytic, psychological, grammatical, lexicographic” (78). For Wimsatt, Darwin personified the extreme biological model. I want to argue that, without subscribing necessarily to Wimsatt's prognosis, that Darwin's swallowed-up organicism represents something like our own reification of nature and the infant, and that Darwin's arrested model is, in many ways, still the norm. By looking at the poetry of Erasmus Darwin we find the answer to the question “where is the social in Darwin's narrative of aesthetic and natural development?” It is already always present in the trope of infancy. In Darwin's formulation, “habit” is the mortar from which “indissoluble connexions” [sic] are built. Habit, in this sense, is social and collective as well as individual. Personification is its chosen rhetorical trope.

As such, large part of Darwin's achievement in *The Botanic Garden* is to attach the trope of the infant to the tropes of allegoric personification. In the process, he gives birth to a organicism that is all mouth, all hunger, a symbol for our time as much as his own. And yet, as I will show, Darwin's aesthetic attempts to build in a

cure for the very incorporation of infancy, a malady which inscribes itself in the faculty of the sensorium that Darwin calls the volition. Thus, by looking fresh at the poetry we find both a ravenous organicism, as well as a palliative for that condition in a form of release, what Darwin calls “reverie,” and what Christopher Bollas terms an “aesthetic moment,” a “caesura in time” (31)(31).

Hassler has pointed out that Darwin’s main contribution to the romantic poets that follow is the notion of organicism, and William Wimsatt concurs. Jerome McGann, writing about Erasmus Darwin and sentimentalism, claims that “sentiment functions as the conscious eroticism” of his poetry. According to McGann, Darwin’s poetry functions differently than his philosophic and scientific texts in that “thought” appears as energy rather than a concept (The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style 134). The thought of the poetry finds expression in affect rather than reason, largely through the use of transformational terms. The infant and the plant are two of the primary forms or figures that this “self-sustaining process of energy” takes (134).

As I touched on briefly above, Darwin’s own theory of aesthetics, outlined in the first “interlude” of *Lives of the Plants*, locates the difference between poetic and prosaic language squarely in the difference between sensation and abstraction. Poetry is better at describing or translating ideas “derived from visible objects” (41). Thus we have two terms – (energetic rather than abstracted) thought and affect – that come together (organically) in the figure of the infant. This notion of a poetic language that is “closer” to objects and farther from abstraction anticipates ideas of “childhood realism” put forward by theorists of the child such as Piaget. Organicism itself

represents a scientific theory driven primarily by a desire on the part of theorists to uncover a “natural” correspondence between form and content, a theory that might repair the epistemological and ontological damage done by skepticism and abstraction.

Catherine Packham writes about the blurred distinction between science and poetry in Darwin, and marks its continuance in Wordsworth’s famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. She too acknowledges the privileging of visuality in Darwin and Wordsworth over the other senses. She reads this preference as a sign of Darwin’s blurring of the distinctions between poetry and science by exploring their generic conventions. Claiming that personification and analogy become more acceptable in scientific discourses as a result of Darwin’s use of them in poetry, she suggests that Darwin’s aesthetic thus shifts the focus in poetic production away from the faculty of imagination toward the act of reverie, or what Benjamin called aura. Yet Packham does not make the connection between Darwin’s ecstatic, cinematic poetics and the depictions, descriptions, and discourses of infancy. Consider the opening to canto III of *The Economy of Vegetation*, the first of Darwin’s three long poems collectively called *The Botanic Garden*:

NYMPHS! YOU first taught to pierce the secret caves
Of humid earth, and lift her ponderous waves;
Bade with quick stroke the sliding piston bear
The viewless columns of incumbent air;--
Press'd by the incumbent air the floods below,
Through opening valves in foaming torrents flow,
Foot after foot with lessen'd impulse move,
And rising seek the vacancy above.--
So when the Mother, bending o'er his charms,
Clasps her fair nurseling in delighted arms;

Throws the thin kerchief from her neck of snow,
And half unveils the pearly orbs below;
With sparkling eye the blameless Plunderer owns
Her soft embraces, and endearing tones,
Seeks the salubrious fount with opening lips,
Spreads his inquiring hands, and smiles, and sips.

As one of four cantos organized around the elements, this canto is expressly centered on the element of water. As elsewhere in Darwin's poetry, industrial metaphors of pistons and columns sit side by side with the images of infant joy. Colonial exploration and ecological plundering finds expression, and perhaps a "natural" justification, here as well. A hybrid body is suggested, part maternal machine, part golem, built up of water *and* earth, i.e. from mud from "humid earth." But not just one body, rather two that are enjoined and consequently mastered or "owned."

The natural upheaval described is rewritten as a confusing orientation of bodies. What results is a vertiginous sense of spinning top to bottom to top again. The first spatial orientation is from the point of view of the water, or rather the nymphs, which view the water shooting up from the earth. Next we're thrown into a strange pronominal confusion of an object bending over a subject: i.e. the mother (in the subject position) is not the subject in the long sentence that makes up the second half of the passage. We are quickly in the point of view of the infant. Somehow water rising up has become the breast descending down. The plundered mother clasps her plunderer – delightedly. The secrets of the earth and water are like the secrets of the mother's body offered, disclosed (unveiled) to the babe. The reader becomes the plunderer of the text and the mother's body.

Readerly pleasure, suggested by and inscribed in the maternal body, is one significant feature of Darwin's *Botanic Gardens*. Darwin recapitulates in the poetry

his aesthetic theory of volitional pleasure and pain. In *Zoonomia* Darwin attempts to describe diseases of “volition” (mania, phobias, etc.) as deriving from a surplus of volitional motion, something like a tension produced by the will that has no direct object, it therefore returns to the body as a symptom. The pleasure and pain that poetry and art provide cause us to:

cease to attend to the irritations of common external objects, and cease also to use any voluntary efforts to compare these interesting trains of ideas with our previous knowledge of things, a complete (sic) reverie is produced: during which time however short, if it be but for the moment, the objects themselves appear to exist before us. 48

Here, of course, is Packham’s reverie. Yet Darwin’s material textual production strives to reproduce a poetics of pleasure as well. One of the aspects that make the original texts of these poems so satisfying and unique is that they were presented with textual notes and hand colored illustrations.

One such note, attached to the line “lift her ponderous waves” explains:

The invention of the pump is of very ancient date, being ascribed to one Ctesibius an Athenian, whence it was called by the Latins *machina Ctesibiana*; but it was long before it was known that the ascent of the piston lifted the superincumbent column of the atmosphere, and that then the pressure of the surrounding air on the surface of the well below forced the water up into the vacuum, and that on that account in the common lifting pump the water would rise only about thirty-five feet, as the weight of such a column of water was in general an equipoise to the surrounding atmosphere. The foamy appearance of water, when the pressure of the air over it is diminished, is owing to the expansion and escape of the air previously dissolved by it, or existing in its pores. When a child first sucks it only presses or champs the teat, as observed by the great Harvey, but afterwards it learns to make an incipient vacuum in its mouth, and acts by removing the pressure of the atmosphere from the nipple, like a pump (163).

The slide from the discourses of industry and scientific explanation to infant observation is as transparent and unadorned here as it is in the stanza itself. The earth is personified as having “pores;” and the infant’s mouth becomes a pump. In *Zoonomia* we saw the infant analogized as animal; here, its instrumentality, its structure and design, analogize tools for technological advancement. If, as Hassler argues, Darwin’s primary legacy to the poets that follow is his theory of organic development, then surely one of his innovations is the displacement of the mother’s body back out onto nature as an argument for organic form.

I wrote earlier that Darwin displaces the body of the mother onto aesthetic objects. I also commented on Canto III of *Economy of Vegetation*, in which we encounter the image of the maternal as a kind of substance to be mined, “owned,” or plundered. The placement of the mother *over* her child in the passage quoted above ascribes to her a certain power; yet it is a protective and generous power freely offered to the child. The placement of the infant *under* the mother places the child in the position of the autonomous subject/poet in nature, the “natural” heir to her “secret caves.” Strikingly, the next stanza in the canto derides women who refuse the cries of their infant children, refuse them the “soothing kiss and milky rill” (see Downman’s poem “Infancy”). Through their proximal placement in the text as well as their shared iconic status, Darwin conflates nursing mothers with the inspiring muses. Composition thus becomes a trope of feeding, and vice versa. Aesthetic production and consumption, like industrial production and consumption is naturalized in the form of that most beloved of symbols—mother and child.

Terry Eagleton has written eloquently and often on the role of maternal imaginary in the aesthetic and its deleterious effects.²² Timothy Fulford has similarly written of the sexualized “feminine” (although not necessarily maternal) aesthetic in Darwin’s poetry (125). What I want to add is that by infantilizing the reader a strange power dynamic occurs; we (as readers) become *dependent* not only on the natural resources the text is intended to signify, but also on the materiality of the text itself, its pleasure producing affects. The potential strain this places on nature and the text to produce the maximum reverie is evident in the preamble to the opening canto of Darwin’s last great poem of *The Botanic Garden, The Temple of Nature*:

Shrin’d in the midst majestic NATURE stands,
Extends o’er earth and sea her hundred hands;
Tower upon tower her beamy forehead crests,
And births unnumbered milk her hundred breasts” 129-132

Initially titled “The Origin of Society,” *The Temple of Nature* consists of four cantos tracing the production and reproduction of life, the progress of the mind, and the beginnings of good and evil. The personification of nature is triumphant, yet I also want to suggest that it is also betrays a barely masked anxiety. The “unnumbered births” are not necessarily her own and they clearly outnumber her hundred breasts. These moments of anxiety are woven into an allegorical tale in which multiple personifications appear along with multiple figures from Roman and Greek mythology. The sense of Nature’s besiegement fits easily into the genre of allegory. Yet given the anxiety surrounding the discourse of breast-feeding at the time, I want to argue that the anxiousness reflects the sense of being dependent, textually (i.e. as a reader), literally, and metaphorically, on the breast.²³ Nature then becomes an over-taxed wet-nurse, and we her unnumbered births.

Like all western creation myths, especially those eighteenth-century ones that follow after Milton, *The Temple of Nature* relies heavily on a notion of a fall from grace, a disconnect from nature. Fredric Jameson comments on the double bind that faced those who thought about the origins of society in the eighteenth century. Implied, says Jameson in any of the periods considerations of the origin of society are (a) the need to evolve *out* of nature, and (b) the need to find our way back *in* by reading the signs of nature, which will point to a future redeemed (c.f. 87 and 114). The beginning of the preamble to the first canto of *Temple of Nature* remarks precisely on these same ambivalent forces, which act to “bind Society in golden chains” (8). Reproductive forces, the drive that impels both plant and human life, produce “unnumbered births” that force us into societal structures that bind us in “golden chains,” while at the same time they tax the maternal (poetic, political, physical) resources of nature, society, and aesthetic production (as evinced in Darwin’s appositive and self-generating verses).

In part, organicism arises (as a theory and world-view) as an attempt to undo the rift created by the perpetuation of ever-new narratives of the fall, and as a counter-narrative that seeks to bring just-developing societal structures under the umbrella of the “natural.” Accordingly, organicism, at least in Darwin’s variant, does not end at the bodies limits. Aesthetic production and reproduction are dependent on (somatic rather than psychic – yet always primarily *visual*) memory.²⁴ Darwin does not comment on memory directly, but claims that we come to associate certain ideas, thoughts and feelings that are connected by “tribes.” Thus the direct impact of the

social world is minimalized in Darwin, except to the extent that these processes are registered directly on the body, or to the extent to which they are universalizable. What Darwin calls the “animal sensorium” is always in the driver’s seat of subject development as well as in aesthetics. Like infants, our motivation, even when habitualized, is driven by organic, material processes:

By the various efforts of our sensations to acquire or avoid their objects, many muscles are daily brought into successive or synchronous actions; these become associated by habit, and are then excited together with great facility, and in many instances gain indissoluble connexions. *Zoonomia*

34, 35

Yet, as I have tried to argue, the reduction of the social realm in Darwin does not mean its complete erasure, as is evident in the “unnumbered births.” The social also shows itself in Darwin’s generic use of personification in his poetry. The generic markers tend to confound his stabs at a pure poetic materialism (to bring nature under the banner of science). Thus the poetry displays a unique tension between external causes and anxieties that threaten the organic identification of infant to nature. A kind of *excess sociality* intrudes and interrupts the reverie, if only in the form of conventions and generic expectations.

For example, returning to the realm of the maternal, Canto III of *Temple of Nature*, “The Progress of the Mind,” in ways that anticipate *and* complicate Schiller and Coleridge, suggests that Surprise and Curiosity, that is, the aesthetic impulse for play, lead to Beauty, and that paradoxically, Beauty leads back to the remembered images and sensations that are the most familiar:

AS the pure language of the Sight commands
The clear ideas furnish'd by the hands;
Beauty's fine forms attract our wondering eyes,
And soft alarms the pausing heart surprise.
Warm from its cell the tender infant born
Feels the cold chill of Life's aerial morn;
Seeks with spread hands the bosoms velvet orbs,
With closing lips the milky fount absorbs;
And, as compress'd the dulcet streams distil,
Drinks warmth and fragrance from the living rill;
Eyes with mute rapture every waving line,
Prints with adoring kiss the Paphian shrine,
And learns erelong, the perfect form confess'd,
IDEAL BEAUTY from its Mother's breast. (163-176).

As in *Zoonomia*, we see that ideality and representation have their origin in the “language of sight.” Here are the same spread hands, the same sucking lips, the same ample, always available breasts. But what we have here is the obverse of the *Zoonomia* description. Rather than work from the breast to the aesthetic object, here, the *social* progress of the mind, directing us toward an aesthetics, that will, like Schiller’s, lead us to freedom, leads us full circle back to the mother’s breast. This description has the added advantage of showing the maternal space as being in stark dialectical relation to the “cold chill of Life's aerial morn.”

I have suggested that Darwin’s aesthetic of infancy is primarily incorporative (arrested, fetishistic) rather than introjective. I now want to extend that claim by saying that in *The Temple of Nature* nature gets swallowed (“saluted”) along with the breast, yielding an incorporative ecology as well as an incorporative aesthetics. Winnicott writes in *The Location of Cultural Experience* that the “place where cultural experience is located in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment” (Playing and Reality 100). He goes on to say that this environment was “originally the object,” that is, the breast and then the transitional object. In Darwin,

the space of mediation or in-between is the place of *Zoonomia*'s "language of sight," yet the original is always present. It is never let go of. It haunts and suffuses every image with its "perfect form." Nature, or rather her representations, her hundred breasts and unnumbered births to feed, those technologies that are analogized with infants and will mine and "own" her—all of these represent the limits of a cultural experience that is static, arrested, and fixed. Fascination—in the sense of being "fixed" or "riveted"—is a form of desire. Thus, the sense of desire or loss that is absent in *Zoonomia* is present, at least obliquely, in the poetry.

We are all infants in the sense that we all ingest and process images and objects—the mother's body being the primary and privileged object. The image recurs to us in various forms; likewise, other images devolve back to it. It is, as Darwin writes in volume II of *Zoonomia*, as though the object has invaded our body. Many "motions" (trains of thought or actions of the body) are termed involuntary when in fact they are the result of an "excess of volition" (276). To free ourselves from the mania that accompanies excessive volition (an early form of melancholia), Darwin suggests that we must "*think without words*"—thus, *the emphasis on sight*. The aesthetic object provides a letting go of correspondences between the object before us and "our previous knowledge of things" (48). In fact, Darwin's "reverie" and "thinking without words" come close to Kant's aesthetic of the sublime. Perhaps it is not surprising, that the good doctor, who routinely proscribed massive doses of opium to his patients, would argue for such dissociation: aesthetics as a form of anesthesia for our collective loss of the maternal, recreated as ideal beauty.

Part 2: Coleridge's Symbolic Infant

Coleridge's chapter "On the Origin of the Idea of God in the Mind of Man" in fragment II of *Opus Maxium*, offers a similar narrative of infant development, one which begins and ends with the mother.

Even in its very first Week of Being, the holy quiet of its first days must be sustain'd by the warmth of the maternal bosom. The first dawnings of its humanity will break forth in the Eye that connects the Mother's face with the warmth of the mother's bosom, the support of the mother's arms. A thousand tender kisses excite a finer life in its lips, and there first language is imitated from the mother's smiles. 120-121

Yet unlike Darwin, Coleridge does not see the lineaments of a "natural" aesthetic in the mother's body; rather, he sees it as the origin of all alienation, all epistemological distortion.²⁵

...for the infant the mother contains his own self, and the whole problem of existence as a whole; and the word "GOD" is the first and one solution to the problem. Ask you, what is its meaning for the child? Even this: 'the something to which my mother looks up, and which is more than my mother. 131

The orientation of gazes goes from infant to mother, who does not return the infant gaze, but rather looks toward God in prayer. Coleridge calls this moment the beginning of thought. Some (outside) form of otherness places demands on the attention of the mother, and the child is forced to comprehend, for the first time, its individual existence (126, 127).²⁶ Thus, the severed connection of mother to child becomes the prototype for all subsequent linguistic and cognitive situations. The infant must perform a hermeneutical interpretation of the mother, who, like an oral language that precedes the written word (*logos* prior to text), exists prior to her

constituent parts or letters. Only by positing the presence of God, an “alterity” (Coleridge’s coinage) that is the “first and one solution,” whose *shape* for the infant is the earthly father, and whose *form* is the heavenly one, only by this mediation can meaning be ascribed to the mother’s distraction and the consequent sense of loss the child suffers in the broken gaze. Coleridge thus theorizes that the gap set up by the mother’s distraction allows for a substitution, for an interpretive code to enter in.²⁷ Through this process of substitution, the child is able to recognize forms, rather than merely shapes.

By stating that the “whole Problem of existence” is “present” within the mother, Coleridge introduces a spatial metaphor. He imagines an inside and outside to the child’s consciousness.²⁸ And this recognition for the child is simultaneously its recognition of another (the mother), a recognition of the self (as separate from the mother), and a recognition of the other *of* the other (God or the father).²⁹ The child experiences the mother as a space to inhabit, yet one which always already “contains his own self.” These early markings of boundaries are attempts to understand the world. Yet, symbolization is only possible when a part of the image of the mother is repressed to the unconscious, that is, when it is taken in. As Jean Laplanche explains, expanding on what is only latent in Freud, when the child cannot translate an “enigmatic message” from the parent—for example, when a mother turns her attention away to pray or to attend to the needs of her husband—the child designates the untranslatable part of this situation to the unconscious where it simply “is,” a thing-presentation, a designified signifier. Unable to translate the enigma of the mother’s distraction, Coleridge’s child then has to interpret—to fill up with

meaning—the gap created by the father, by God, by any interruption of the mother’s love.

For Coleridge, translation and the possibility of mistranslation of the mother’s image are paramount concerns:

and hence, through each degree of dawning light, the whole [of the mother’s image] remains antecedent to the parts, not as composed of them but as their ground and proper meaning, <no> otherwise than as the word or sentence to the single letters which occur in its spelling. Let it not be deemed trifling or ludicrous if I say that our modern philosophy is spelling throughout, and its lessons as strange, or but for the gradual breaking down of the soul by force of habit, and by the very faith which it is intended to subvert—it is as strange, I say, as the assertion is to a child when he is first told that A B is *ab*, or W H O is *who*. (Coleridge, McFarland and Halmi 131)

The mother thus “contains” the problem of existence, the problem of having, and failing, to mean. Like a word that does not rely on the arrangement of its letters for meaning, but rather restores language to meaning from chaos, the mother is set up as a transcendental limit for the child. Philosophy, says Coleridge, operates on a similar principle—a habitual and irreligious “breaking down” of the soul, not towards meaning—*logos* or the word—but towards the salvation of language through the adequation of letters to word, or human constituent fragments of the total image of the divine. One way of understanding this desire to return to a ground before “composition,” to a “proper meaning,” is to correlate it to the desire to be undifferentiated with the mother.

Yet the passage turns away from this deconstruction of the mother’s image in order to engage in a spelling lesson. The words Coleridge uses as examples are instructive: “*ab*” (from the Latin meaning ‘from’) and “*who*.” If we read these terms

together of—correcting for the use of the interrogative pronoun in the nominative case—then Coleridge’s questions can be reiterated as: “from whom do we come?” The answer comes obliquely; “for the infant the mother contains his own self, and the whole problem of existence as a whole; and the word “GOD” is the first and one solution to the problem.” Moving by associative logic, Coleridge uses the disorientation, or rather the *surprise*—the mother was thought of as a whole; how shocking to learn that she is merely a part—of the child to describe, ask, and answer the “whole problem of existence.” Resembling a Chinese Box or Russian nesting dolls that contain within themselves progressively smaller yet identical versions of themselves, we are contained in the mother who is herself contained in God. All linguistic and philosophic attempts aimed at solving or even describing the problem are doomed, if only because they *cannot solve for an antecedent word or phrase that is impervious to changes in its composition*, the unconscious idea of a mother or God. God/ Father—that to which the mother turns, or worse (harder, more threatening for the child to imagine), that which is “inside” the mother—is a problem that contains its own solution.

Coleridge then reiterates this recursive structure in terms of the family romance. Not only is the mother conceived of in linguistic terms, but the child itself is like a word that no longer resembles itself:

even as we sometimes dwell on a word that we had just written till we doubt, first, whether we had spelt it right, and at length it seems to us as if no such word could exist; and, in a kind of momentary trance, strive to make out its meaning out of the component letters, or of the lines of which they are composed, and nothing results! In such a state of mind has many a parent heard the three-years child that has awoken during the dark night in the little crib by the mother’s bed entreat in

piteous tones, 'Touch me, only touch me with your finger.' A child of that age, under the same circumstances, I myself heard using these very words in answer to the mother's enquires, half hushing and half chiding, "I am not here, touch me, Mother, that I may be here!" (Coleridge, McFarland and Halmi 132)

The cry for an unmediated touch reproduces a desire for a poetic language of experience—an antecedent and inviolable word or phrase—that Coleridge seems to desire nearly as much as the touch, a language that would itself be tangible, which can guarantee existence. The flight from the mother's body (I take this image from the unpublished manuscript ending to "Frost at Midnight"—see below) is at once a movement toward God and an identification with the earthy father.

The witness of its [the child's] own being had been suspended in the loss of the mother's presence by sight or sound or feeling. The father and the heavenly father, the form in the shape and the form affirmed for itself are blended in one, and yet convey the earliest lesson of distinction and alterity. There was another beside the mother, and the child beholds it and repeats, and as light from light, transferring, not diminishing, carries onward the former love to the new object. There is another, which it does not behold, but it is above; and while the mother's eye is turned upward, the pressure to her bosom is yet closer, and kiss which her returning lips impress is longer, and a steadfast gaze and a silence had preceded it.

Coleridge is careful to guard against the trap of complete idealization by indicating a strengthening of the mother's love for the infant in the mediated, triangulated relation between mother, father/God, and child, saving the relation from the dangers of asceticism and homoeroticism.

The infant's ability to distinguish between shape and form is crucial for Coleridge. Shapes can delude us and satisfy us only so far; attention to form allows us to slip the confines of personality—what Coleridge calls a phantom self—for the larger and roomier space of what he terms personicity – the ontological realm of

incarnation. In terms that anticipate Marx's explanation of the fetishism of commodities in Volume One of *Capital*, Coleridge continues throughout the section to foreground the linguistic or abstracted nature of these processes, and to show the necessity for children to be surrounded by people or forms as opposed to things or shapes; the threat for the infant, says Coleridge, is that she herself will become a thing (126).³⁰ By imitating the mother's turn toward the divine, we learn to avoid the reification of shapes through the introjection of the other's other as a process or stage of our development.

It is therefore not surprising that Coleridge privileges metaphors of interpretation. Maria Torok makes clear that introjection is primarily a linguistic phenomenon. Words take the place of the breast in the mouth. Naming, interpretation, translation—all tropes of aesthetic production as well as subjective origination—become instruments for the processes of normative introjection. Coleridge's hermeneutics of infancy leads to a recovery of signification, the opposite of Darwin's demetaphorization. What Lacan calls the "subject who knows," the therapist in analysis, or God in Coleridge's narrative, allows for a theory of the subject as well as an aesthetics that does not stutter and get stuck on shapes, but rather sees deeply into forms.

Coleridge's Introjective Poetics, or the Flight from the Mother's Body

Turning now to Coleridge's poetry: the limits of his introjective aesthetics (often associated I would argue with his "auto-erotic tendencies," his "masculinism," or his "romantic" ideology) can perhaps best be seen in the excision of the final passage of

“Frost at Midnight.”³¹ While the published version of the poem ends with the eave-drops “quietly shining to the quiet moon,” the Quarto edition continues:

Like those, my babe! which ere tomorrow’s warmth
Have capp’d their sharp keen points with pendulous drops,
Will catch thine eye, and with their novelty
Suspend thy little soul ; then make thee shout,
And stretch and flutter from thy mother’s arms
As thou would’st fly for very eagerness.

The excision of these lines, cut says Coleridge, to “save the rondo,” do indeed save the rondo or dance of father and son, but only by cutting the maternal presence entirely from the poem. That the rondo, or dance, of father and son is preserved at the expense of the mother’s presence should not be surprising. Development or *Bildung*, perhaps the signature conceptual framework in the period we’ve been discussing, whether economic or infantile, requires constant movement from one stage to the next, even as it requires an erasure of the means of its production.

Humphrey House praises the cuts noting that “once the vista of new domestic detail was opened there was no reason why it should not be indefinitely followed, with increasing shapelessness” (82). The “new domestic detail” (“informal and conversational as family talk”) threatens to encroach or overpower what House sees as the poem’s main theme, the “movement of the mind” (83). Yet the cancelled lines, by extending the metaphor of mutability (the eave-drops assuming various forms – or, to follow House, the mutable movement of the mind) to the domain of the domestic, trace a greater arc or “shape” to the movement of mind, even if they do threaten to infect the poem with an aesthetic shapelessness. At stake then are at least two lines of flight from the maternal body, one, the movement of the child within the excised

lines, and two, Coleridge's own editorial act of excision – another flight might be our own critical flight away from shapelessness (i.e. moments of irregularity and otherness). It is primarily the flight to or from the mother's body, which figures as decidedly more, as we have already seen, than as a mere synecdoche for the “domestic,” that this final section of the chapter will explore.

Judith Plotz reads the excision as an attempt to “quiet Hartley down” to equate him with nature itself (220).³² If Plotz is guilty of an overly literal biographical reading, it should be admitted that a certain literalness – taking metaphors as designifying objects – is a key concern for a romantic poetics of infancy. Therefore I am going to risk a similarly literal reading of these lines, but focused more on the absence of the mother's body than on the defects of the father. I rely in part on David Beres' notion of Coleridge's orality and in part on E. Darwin's oddly oral fixated aesthetics of the breast. The child flies from its mother's arms (i.e. her breasts) in order to be captivated by the “sharp keen points” of the icicles, a clear correspondence with Darwin's concept of a fleshly, “breast-like” aesthetic. Remember Darwin's assertion that we desire, in a literal way, to place these aesthetic, secondary objects in our mouths. The pendulous drops (breast milk?) have not yet fallen. These are ripe forms which pull the child away from the mother and toward the suspension of soul (and of soul-making activity?). Present then in the image of the icy breast-like shapes and the suspended soul of the infant is an inchoate twinned theory of aesthetics and subject formation.

Coleridge's odd descriptions in the passage contribute to this strange mixture. The child “shouts, stretches, and flutters.” While these terms approach the language

of nature employed in the letters and journal entries concerning Hartley, he is primarily depicted in the prose texts as whirling, being blown by wind, or as the wind itself. The logic of the passage suggests that before a will can be nature or even give itself to nature, it must first be called or summoned by objects that bear resemblance to ordinary objects. In other words, Coleridge's description of Hartley suggests certain infantile stages or progressive movements of the mind, body, and soul – note that the primary movement is *from the domestic to nature*. (According to first-hand accounts of Hartley, thought and distracted musing occupy the boy at a later stage.) These descriptions and their effects—Hartley wanting to suckle the icicles for example—also reproduce Darwin's incorporative aesthetics, which may also have contributed to Coleridge's decision to excise them.

In fact, the recognition of a transcendental limit or border between inside and out, thought and thing, nature and symbol, *signified by the frosted window pane*, marks "Frost" as belonging to a different aesthetic entirely from Darwin's. Yet the limits of Coleridge's theory are equally visible insofar as introjection allows for an erasure of its point of origin. The poem, without the excised passage, traces a movement from the inside to out, from the domestic to nature. Yet it resists naming or representing one side of the dynamic, that which the child flies *from*, specifically, the mother's body. Again, it matters that this erasure is multiple. There are several lines of flight, imaginative, temporal, identificatory. Yet none of these lines is traceable back to the mother. That is because introjection, as a process, is not only an introjection of the object but of the ideology or drive that underwrites it. Therefore, the compensatory movement erases its initial term.

Clearly, what I have been describing is a movement *toward* a masculine aesthetics. “The Nightingale,” written two months after “Frost,” reproduces and furthers the introjective demarcation of domestic and natural spaces at the same time as it further signals the multidirectional aspect to House’s movement of the mind. The opening tableau of the poem replicates the space of the mother and the child depicted in *Opus Maximum*. There is a characteristic Coleridgean privileging of sight over sound: “You see the glimmer of the stream beneath, / But hear no murmuring” (lms. 5,6). Reversing Wordsworth’s natural imbibing of poetic sound from nature in Book 1 of the *Prelude* (the infant is fed by ear and mouth), Coleridge quiets the “natural” sounds of nature in order to make way for the entrance of birdsong that will be the poem’s core conceit.³³ The poet, attuned to the song, imagines a melancholy bird, and then corrects that affective attribution as an anthropomorphic projection: “In Nature there is nothing melancholy” (15). This recognition shuts the poet off from Nature’s “fame,” and thus, her immortality. But this demotion of ambition is something that the “modern” poet must endure. It is the price of a new poetics. The poet, along with his friend and the friend’s sister (William and Dorothy), understand the proper place for the poet as observer and objective chronicler of her beauty. Yet even so, Coleridge is unable even to describe the song of the bird without attributing to it human emotion – although this is slightly corrected or meliorated by the poet’s open and performative use of simile as opposed to metaphor: “As [if] he were fearful” (46 my emphasis).

The opening of “Nightingale” describes a confrontation of poet and nightingale that reproduces the child/mother dyad of *Opus Maximum*. At stake is the untranslatability of the song in the first instance, and the mother’s turn toward God in the second. Both set up conditions of unknowing or alterity, yet for any meaning to accrue, certain provisional choices must be made. In the case of the child in *Opus Maximum*, the fiction of an “I,” what Coleridge calls a “phantom self” must be risked. In the case of “The Nightingale,” a poetic fallacy is adduced. Fear is nominally ascribed to the bird, a sense of its temporality slipping away: “As he were fearful that an April night / would be too short for him to utter forth / His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul / Of all its music!” (46-49).

As I have suggested already, people, experiences, places tend to merge and morph in Coleridge’s poems. Yet the message of the poem is that nature and poet must be kept separate in order to avoid the trap of sentimentalism. How then do we explain the bird’s imagined human emotions and motivations or the merging of child and nature at the end of the poem? Clearly, separateness, the very concept of the individual, is presented as a method, a poetics, rather than an essential truth.

Coleridge is able to give shape to the fiction of separateness, in part, through the sharp distinction between archaic and prospective definition of word “lore.” Remember that the poet claims early in the poem that unlike earlier eighteenth-century poets whom ascribed anthropomorphic affect or thinking to nature, he and his cohorts had learned “far other lore.” In “Frost at Midnight,” S.T.C. promises to the sleeping Hartley that the child would learn *far other lore* than he himself had learned. “Lore” of course means learning, and has come to stand for something like the realm

of the empirical, of the liberal individual as well. But still operative at the time of Coleridge's composition was another usage meaning "doom" and "destruction."

Now an ecocritical reading of this poetry (the destruction of the natural world being one of the poems' *other* core concerns) is certainly possible. Yet I want to argue that the destruction or doom that is "learned" is also a more subtle and philosophical destruction, an awareness that learning and knowledge – like language – are beside the point when it comes to questions of the other (father/son, poet/nature, infant/mother). In other words, the "lore" that is learned is paradoxical: we are connected (the self is a phantom (i.e. a constructed) object, always in relation to other forms and shapes) and yet we are alone (the mother's desire, and even nature, is sealed off from us). In other words, lore ([poetic and cultural] tradition, lineage, history), in Coleridge's sense, is best described as a useful fiction; it is incumbent upon us to remain skeptical about the value of lore (of received – i.e. historical *or* poetic knowledge) even as we strive to comprehend it, or rather as we strive to comprehend the degree to which we are imprisoned by it. Julie Kipp has written about the ways in which the maternal body at this historical moment comes to represent "a form of union that nonetheless allows for separateness" (27). This fiction of separateness relies on the constant influx of lore into the poetic system. Yet Coleridge's ambivalence about the value of lore, its mutability as well as its necessity, reveals an awareness that beyond a certain point, all legibility and acts of translation are essentially doomed to the sheer chaos of intersubjective noise, the explosion of meaning that is the effect of both language and history. The position of

the infant in this poetry is that of one who is uniquely affected by, perhaps adjacent to rather than *in*, but never outside or prior to, the clutches of destructive lore.

So it is that the child presented to the moon at the conclusion of “The Nightingale,” Hartley, represents a space, a site, where this explosion of noise and cross-projections can be witnesses and perhaps (temporarily) stilled.

My dear babe,
Who, capable of no articulate sound,
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,
How he would place his hand beside his ear,
His little hand, the small forefinger up,
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise
To make him Nature's play-mate. He knows well
The evening-star; and once, when he awoke
In most distressful mood (some inward pain
Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream--)
I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,
And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well!--
It is a father's tale:

Anna Talyor reads these lines as revealing Coleridge’s “‘undertow’ of disapproval and rejection” of Hartley (39). Specifically, she reads as surprisingly harsh the line “mars all things with his imitative lisp.”³⁴ What Taylor misses, it seems to me, are the ways in which Hartley is used as a figure in this scene, a trope for a new poetics. As such, it is not his imitative powers of articulation that point toward a new lore, but rather his receptivity, his ability to point and be still(ed), be hushed and suspended. There is a critique here in other words, but it is less a chastisement of the child than a statement about the limits of poetic imitation. We might also hear in Coleridge’s comment on the imitative lisp a critique of “naïve” forms of poetic diction, such as

his critique of Wordsworth's usage of the term "the language of real life" in the second, expanded preface.³⁵ Because the infant in these poems is always (partly) a complex figure for the poet, all the poems are (partly) *ars poeticae*, able to comment on the problems inherent in poetic representation.

Of course, complicating any reading of the child in "The Nightingale" is the shifting referent of babe and dream (the "strange thing" could refer to child and dream, at least until the clarifying appositive "an infant's dream"), and the positing of an "inward pain"—either arising from or attaching to the child (something like what poetic language does when it takes as an object a figure for the self), or arising (the source being inward) from the child and attaching to a dream. Of course, prosaically, the origin or source of "inward pain" might be read as simply gas or the pain of a tooth coming in. Coleridge's "theory of dreams" in fact supports such a reading.³⁶ But it is possible that the pain is also connected to the other expressed interiority in the poem—the "dear homes" that await the loitering poet, the thought of which in fact seems to worry both the poet and the poem: "We have been loitering long and pleasantly, / And now for our dear homes.-That strain again! / Full fain it would delay me!" (89-91) No matter the source of the inward pain, I am suggesting that the interior space that the poet flies from (with the babe) and delays returning to (with his companions) should be read as the space of infancy, a recreated womb-like structure that moves out in concentric circles from the originary (and undifferentiated) space of the mother/child pairing into realms of increasing sociality. There is something safe, perhaps dangerously safe, in the domestic stupor of "dear homes." Compare the use of the plural and generalizing "dear" to the idealized, "hospitable home" of the maid.

Also important is the double meaning present in the word “strain” (“That strain again!”). The heavy spondee and the dash arrest the nearly mono-syllabic line. Into that over-crowded metric space the bird's call sounds again. The exterior emptiness (of cloud, of color, of light) which precipitates the first appearance of the nightingales (i.e., the aporia that necessitates the poem) then returns as an implied interior emptiness of the dear homes.

It would be only half right to say that the emptiness is filled by either moon and child or nightingale and child – rather we should say that the emptiness is filled by the *relation*, the *distance* between moon and child, nightingale and poet. Clearly the moon is a feminine symbol, and Coleridge, following Charlotte Smith, has employed this figure before.³⁷ Yet the symbol exists both in the night sky *and* (glittering) in the baby's eye. This is the new lore, a constant movement away from and toward, orienting oneself toward the displaced body of the mother. In many ways, it may be seen to resemble the old lore, in that in the hero's journey of epic poetry there is a correlative flight from the maternal, the domestic. As Alan Richardson and others have argued, male romantic poets routinely appropriated aspects of femininity as part of their poetics. Let's say then that is an introjective lore—a “father's tale—a learning, a line of flight. It is not just a circuitous route, as M. H. Abrams famously claimed as a dominate figure for romanticism in *Natural Supernaturalism*, but a perverse and recursive motion to and fro, a flight without knowable end.

Towards a Poetics of Distance

I've suggested above a critique of Darwin's incorporative aesthetics and political movements which seek to romantically preserve the object, whether that object is a romanticized idea of nature as recapitulated aesthetic forms or designs, or whether it is a dream of endlessly recuperable pleasures. I have also put pressure on the idea of a normative "healthy" cycle of introjection and projection, at least so far as it is reflected in Coleridge's conversation poems. If introjection of the object is also introjection of the drive, then, as Jameson and others have shown, it is also the introjection of the ideology which produced the concept of the drive.³⁸ Implicit in any critique of the normalizing tendencies of introjective growth therefore must be a critique of the discourse of psychoanalysis itself. Torok writes that "the introjection of desire puts an end to objectal dependency" (111). The discourses of independence, duty, sacrifice, and exchange – these are well known romantic tropes. They are also, not inconsequently, the tropes of early and late capitalism.

Rather than an incorporative model, an arrested, stuttered, oral aesthetic of pleasure such as Darwin offers, or Coleridge's exchange model of introjective, consolatory subjectivity, I suggest that we think the infant aesthetic in these discourses through D. W. Winnicott's notion of object *usage* rather than object *relating*. Winnicott explains the concept like this: there are two babies at the mother's breast, one that is feeding on the self (i.e. one that has not yet differentiated itself from the mother), and one that is feeding on the mother (i.e. one that recognizes itself and its mother as separate beings). The movement from relating to the object to using it involves imaginatively:

...placing the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control; that is, the subject's perception of the object as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity, [is] in fact recognition of this as an entity in its own right. 93

Winnicott, in another essay, argues that culture exists precisely in this transitory, in between state.³⁹ He argues that a key component of object usage is that the child is able to imaginatively destroy the object and that the object must survive the infant's anger. Perhaps only by means of an aesthetics of cultural ambivalence rather than disinterest, one that recognizes, however uncomfortably, objects (people, nature) as "entities in their own right," that we can return, if not to our original objects, then to the objects that surround us now.

Famously, when Coleridge first saw his first son Hartley, he wrote in a letter to Thomas Poole that his heart was sad and his mind contemplative. He did not feel the joy he expected to feel. Instead, he spent two hours in this painful state unable to cathect the child and his new role as a father. It was only when he saw his son at its mother's breast that he could give to it a "father's kiss" (*Letters* 236). Coleridge seems to need to contextualize the child, to see it placed at its mother's breast, in order to feel his connectedness to the child. This allows for, as we can see in the finished sonnet, for a ternary sense of relatedness, father to son to mother and back again.

CHARLES! my slow heart was only sad, when first
I scann'd that face of feeble infancy:
For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst
All I had been, and all my child might be!
But when I saw it on its mother's arm,
And hanging at her bosom (she the while
Bent o'er its features with a tearful smile)
Then I was thrill'd and melted, and most warm

Impress'd a father's kiss: and all beguil'd
Of dark remembrance and presageful fear,
I seem'd to see an angel-form appear--
'Twas even thine, belovéd woman mild!
So for the mother's sake the child was dear,
And dearer was the mother for the child.

Unquestionably, Coleridge projects himself into the role of the infant at the end of the poem, at the mother's breast. Ashton and Carlson have each written in different genres (biographical and literary critical respectively) of Coleridge's intense need for maternal love.⁴⁰ The problem does seem to stem from the speaker in the poem and not the child. It is as though the slow, sad heart, that is, affect or intuition, must be brought under a concept—a thought, a nameable relation. This inability to name, to control, or to categorize feelings or relations seems a kind of hell in the poem. The speaker's own fear of feeling becomes a contagious spirit in the room so that past, present, and future collapse into a single synchronic moment: "For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst / All I had been, and all my child might be!" From the letter to Lamb we know that this inability to understand his feelings is predicated on an expectation, a received cultural and social notion of what a father is *supposed* to feel when presented with an infant, especially a father of the "new type," that is, trained in the school of "sensibility": "When I first saw the child, I did not feel that thrill and overflowing of affection which I expected." Lamb's letter also informs us that Coleridge spent a full two hours in this pensive and confused state.

The sonnet differs in another sense from the letter: it appends a secondary epiphany. There is a turning away or swerve from the mother/child dyad similar to that which we witnessed in *Opus Maximum*, in which the child's loving gaze toward the mother is redirected toward God. The letter ends with the Coleridge's kiss; the

sonnet continues: "...and all beguil'd / Of dark remembrance and presageful fear, / I seem'd to see an angel form appear." This angel form replaces, merges with, and / or subsumes the mother-wife. Thus, the turn toward God, in *Opus Maximum*, results in a reification of the mother's cultural meaning, in the sonnet. Her holiness obviates the speaker-father from any responsibility toward the child, even, apparently, as the third presence whose role is to take on the earthy form of God. Another way of saying this is to note that idealizing the mother may be simply another form of erasure.

Coleridge's ambivalence toward the demands of parenthood is well known. He writes elsewhere that a "parent—in the strict and exclusive sense a parent!—to me it is a *fable* wholly without meaning except in the *moral* which it suggests—a fable of which the moral is God" (Letters 283). Thus we see that there are two interpretive problems at work in the poem, one for the father, and the other, presumably, for the infant. God (as form) and father (as shape) confound the infant and frustrate his or her desire to be one with the mother. The social *role* of parent is a problem for the father. The solution to both is the recourse to the divine. Yet Coleridge, according to his own schema, bears responsibility as a father to be the shape of divinity here on earth for the child. He is able to evade that responsibility only so far as he is able to project onto the mother, we might say back *into* the mother, the recursive turn toward the divine.

Most readings of this episode, which Coleridge also made into a sonnet, argue that Coleridge's initial discomfort is the result of his projection of his past onto the child (Plotz, Rajan). My reading takes the opposite tack, suggesting that the

discomfort and ambivalence Coleridge feels are evidence of Winnicott's "recognition" of his son as "an entity in its own right." His disorientation is the *effect* of experiencing his son as fully separate from himself. Equilibrium finally comes for Coleridge, but it comes at a price. He does not destroy the object or the ideology of sentiment that produced it; he relinquishes his ambivalence for the certainty of introjective reinscription.

I'm interested in *prying open the two hours* Coleridge spent unable to decide. For I believe that an aesthetics not of in-betweenness (that would reproduce a kind of Deleuzian line of flight), but rather of in-the-middle-ness, such as is suggested by Winnicott's object usage, would *remain* with the ambivalence, the sad heart and the contemplative mind. Coleridge's introjection of the child at the mother's breast comes replete with a reintroduction of the ideologies of fatherhood and bourgeois sensibility. Perhaps our own introjections (of nationalism, family values, etc.) are inevitable, but an aesthetics of object usage suggests periodic breaks and discontinuities in these processes. As these texts suggest, getting objects inside us is the most "natural" thing in all the world; getting objects back into the world, seeing them, and leaving them there for as long as possible seems the more difficult and ethical option.

Afterward as Epitaph

The most melancholy time after the death of a Friend or Child [,] is when you first awake after your first Sleep / when the dizziness, heat & drunkenness of Grief is gone / and the page of hollowness is first felt.⁴¹

Coleridge was even farther away, in Germany, when his second son Berkeley died. A letter from, again, Poole containing the news reached him over a month after the fact.

It seems that Poole was concerned that Coleridge's German studies would be adversely affected by the news (Holmes 223). Coleridge wrote back the following:

But Death—the death of an infant—of one's own infant! I read your letter in calmness, and walked out into the open fields, oppressed not by my feelings, but by the riddles which the thought so easily proposes, and solves—never...My baby has not lived in vain—this life has been to him what it is to all of us—education and development! Fling yourself forward into your immortality only a few thousand years, and how small will not the difference between one year old and sixty years appear! Consciousness!—it is no otherwise necessary to our conceptions of future continuance than as connecting the present link of our being with the one immediately preceding it...But I cannot truly say that I grieve—I am perplexed—I am sad—and a little thing—a very trifle—would make me weep—but for the death of the baby I have *not* wept!

Just as when he first saw Hartley, Coleridge searches and finds that he cannot feel the appropriate feeling. Holmes reads the lack of emotion in the letter as a case of displaced guilt.⁴² However psychologically accurate this reading may be, there is also a sense in which Coleridge's inability to cathect the infant Hartley and his inability to grieve Berkeley's death are directly related to what I have termed his ambivalence.⁴³ No one to my knowledge has commented on Coleridge's core concern in this letter, namely, his inability to accept the brute *fact* that his baby has died. The riddle that oppresses him in his letter to Poole is not unlike the riddle the infant in *Opus Maximum* considers when its mother looks away to God. Remember that God is both the problem and the solution in the infant narrative of maternal abstraction. Here too:

A parent—in the strict and exclusive sense a parent!—to me it is a *fable* wholly without meaning except in the *moral* which it suggests—a fable of which the moral is God. Be it so—my dear, dear friend! Oh let it be so!

The sudden, prayerful interjection “Be it so...Oh let it be so!” reflects Coleridge’s desperate need to believe, to ascribe some meaning to his son’s death. Not just theologically but philosophically and psychologically, Coleridge must align his own will with the will of God. To be a parent (strictly and exclusively) is to assume responsibility for another person’s well-being beyond what is humanly possible. Parenthood, strictly and exclusively speaking, is impossible. Not only is he unable to protect his son, but the distance between his own will (to have his son live) and the will of God (to have his son die) is a gap that must somehow be abided or breached (like the guilty distance that separates him from his wife and dead child and the temporal distance between the event and his awareness of his son’s death).

Remember that for the infant as for Coleridge, the distance *is* God: it is the problem and the solution in one. Ambivalence and object usage become a form of space that can be occupied, an in-the-middle space, a space of gradual acceptance and acknowledgement of God’s will. It becomes, in other words, a transitional space.

Upon receiving Poole’s letter, Coleridge walked along the river throwing stones in as he had done as a child. Like Winnicott’s infant, he places (“flings”) the object (the rocks are the *unacceptable fact* of his son’s death) *outside* his omnipotent control.

All objects (rocks, angel-forms, bodies, poems, and letters) become, in the transitional state of the poet/infant, forms – ways of knowing the world. Real and unreal, they teach us where we end and the world begins. Eventually, Coleridge will write back to Sara. He will take in her sadness. He will try to console her, even if his consolation often takes the strange shape of angel-forms, as when he tellingly

confuses a memory of Hartley, his living son, with Berkeley, his dead one (285). The infant, says Winnicott, must destroy the object in fantasy, and yet the object must survive so that the child can learn that it is acceptable to feel ambivalent towards her mother and her father, that there is no danger of really destroying a parent.

Coleridge ends his letter to Poole by copying out Wordsworth's "A Slumber did My Spirit Seal," a poem that Coleridge (strangely? brilliantly?) assumes Wordsworth wrote from fear of losing his sister Dorothy. The two stanzas face each other on the page, immutable. The lines "She seemed a thing that could not feel / The touch of earthly years" recall Coleridge's warning in *Opus Maximum* that a child raised surrounded by shapes would herself become a thing. Berkeley too is now a thing, "moved round in earth's diurnal course." When he first received Sara's account of the death, Coleridge writes that "there was nothing to *think* of—" (282). Coleridge's *use* of Wordsworth's poem marks an entrance into a transitional/aesthetic/cultural space; it gives him an object on which to think. Forms come in to replace mere shapes, marking a desperate attempt to make the problem and the answer one.

¹ Bollingen Series of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Ed. Barbara Rooke – Routledge and Princeton. This is the 1809 edition. "Little" in the "little children" was cut in the later reprintings.

² STC takes great pains to assure us that his method is completely objective and scientific; his arguments, he says, "are neither abstruse, nor dependent on a long chain of Deductions, nor such as suppose previous habits of metaphysical disquisition" (8,9).

³ While I want to focus in a later section on the "empirical" Coleridge, I base my own gloss on "reflection" in the context of *The Friend* – i.e., that it represents not so much an experiment on self as a philosophic process – largely from the context and from his other uses of the term "reflection" (BL 22 for example). For more on STC's empiricism see Terada and Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* 45-65.

⁴ These works have never been paired to my knowledge, but the editor of *OM*, Thomas McFarland, identifies E. Darwin (ostensibly his materialism) as the prime impetus behind Coleridge's desire to articulate an answer to what McFarland terms "the question of immortality" (*OM* cxi, cxii).

⁵ See Julie Kipp, Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 23-54. Andrea K. Henderson, Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830 (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 18-23.; for the revolutionary meanings the maternal body acquired after the French Revolution see Mary Jacobus, "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-Feeding and the French Revolution," Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution, ed. Sara E.; Rabine Melzer, Leslie W. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 54-75.

⁶ Sociality is threatening, at least as defined by poets and philosophers of the period, insofar as it brings with it Wordsworth's "shadows of the prison house." The mother-infant dyad becomes the signature metaphor because as Kipp writes, "the maternal body seemingly represented a form of union that nonetheless allows for separateness." Therefore "mother-child bonds were frequently referenced as the natural underpinnings of a civil society or even a global Republic," characterizing a "sense of coordinated diversity" (27).

⁷ I am recovering for 19th century poetry a narrative in which the infant figures as a foundational trope, replacing the swain or shepherd as the primary figure for the poet. See Empson (253-264) and Nietzsche (*Birth of Tragedy* 47,48). For my use of trope in a historical sense see Hayden White: "If there is any logic presiding over the transition from the level of fact or event in the discourse of that of narrative, it is the logic of figuration itself, which is to say, tropology. This transition is effected by a displacement of the facts onto the ground of literary fictions or, what amounts to the same thing, the projection onto the facts of the plot structure of one or another of the genres of literary figuration" (47).

⁸ As Richardson points out, "organic" as used in Darwin's subtitle (*The Laws of Organic Life*) means in some ways the opposite from what Coleridge's more idealistic usage means: roughly, materialistic, of the body Alan Richardson, British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism ; 47 (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York :: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 74.

⁹ Darwin replaces existing aesthetic theories (Burke 241-244), which claims that we can only show and describe an "efficient cause" or relation between mind and body, beauty and perceiver, with one that claims to be able to locate a *single origin* for *all forms of beauty*. What's more, this origin is mnemonic, carried in our sense memories or inner sensorium. Beauty is not produced by *ideational* association, but rather is connected to associated movements of habitual *sensorial* motion. In this way, Darwin's biologism resists the basic tenets of more idealizing aesthetic theories. For example, in Kant's aesthetic, agreeableness can never be a precondition for beauty. For Kant, neither the beautiful nor the sublime can depend on a sensation (pleasure or pain) or on a definite concept (such as the Good) but rather must be founded on "indeterminate" concepts (269). Immanuel Kant, "From Critique of Judgment," The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, ed. David Richter, Second ed. (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998).

¹⁰ Judith Butler sees Hegel's unhappy consciousness, Althusser's interpellation, and Freud's sublimation as different articulations of this problem, that is, the problem of desire as that which precipitates subject formation as well as that which returns stubbornly to the subject in the form of loss or guilt or "the body" Judith P. Butler, The Psychic Life of Power : Theories in Subjection (Stanford, Calif. :: Stanford University Press, 1997) 2-29, 57. For a reading of Hegel that foregrounds the importance of desire to the subject see Alexandre Kojève and Raymond Queneau, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, 1969) 31-51, esp. 34-44.

¹¹ Klein uses the term incorporation to describe the internalization of objects in the first passage (from 1940); she then adopts the term "introjection" to describe the identical processes in 1947.

¹² In *The Metaphysics of Ethics* Kant differentiates between a "practical pleasure"—that which is "connected with desiring"—and "contemplative pleasure," not connected to pleasure per se, and roughly synonymous with taste. He further describes what he terms an "appetitive interest," which entails the "combination of pleasure and desire." The crucial difference for Kant involves whether an interest is "of reason" or of sensation—"sensitive" interests being problematic insofar as they are not "free," that is, they are driven exclusively, tyrannically, by the senses. He does, however, allow a role for appetite and desire. When pleasure is previously *determined* by the "appetitive faculty," and has become habitual, it may be determined to be grounded in a rational *interest*, given that we experience "no pleasure in the existence of the object of the representation,

but singly in the representation itself” (Kant *The Metaphysics...* paragraph 345). Immanuel Kant, [The Metaphysics of Ethics](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1443&chapter=56187&layout=html&Itemid=27), 1796, Available: http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1443&chapter=56187&layout=html&Itemid=27.

¹³ It is also possible to imagine an opposite, although potentially related, aesthetic response, in which the percipient feels intensely disgusted by the object. We saw one version of this response in the debates of the nineteen-nineties about NEA funding of so-called “offensive” art. Typically, psychoanalytic theory has interpreted such violent and visceral responses as signs of reaction formation: “The impulse to spit or vomit at the sight of ‘disgusting’ things is only the reaction to the unconscious desire to take these things into the mouth” Sándor Ferenczi, [Final Contributions to the Problems & Methods of Psycho-Analysis](#), International Psycho-Analytical Library. No. 48 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 66.. On this reading, both Jesse Helms and Erasmus Darwin share an inability to distinguish between the object and its representation, regardless if the object is a vase or a photo of a crucifix covered in urine.

¹⁴ For all of its so-called essentialism, Freud’s theories, unlike Darwin’s, place great weight on cultural values and mores, as well as the realm of social habituation – including such sites as what Althusser terms the family milieu. In other words, Oedipal and castration complexes have their origin in culture and society – and are thus contingent are culturally and socially malleable. Laplanche recognizes the externality of complexes (as narrative structures) when he claims that they cannot exist in the unconscious as the result of primary repression Jean Laplanche and John Fletcher, [Essays on Otherness](#) (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999) 93-98.(93-98).

¹⁵ Donald M. Hassler, [Erasmus Darwin](#), by Donald M. Hassler, Twayne’s English Authors Series, Teas 160 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973) 103.

¹⁶ “...Poetry admits of very few words expressive of perfectly abstracted ideas, whereas Prose abounds with them. And as our ideas derived from visible objects are more distinct than those derived from the objects of our other senses, the words expressive of these ideas belonging to vision make up the principal part of poetic language” (41).

¹⁷ See Alan Richardson, “Erasmus Darwin and the Fungus School,” [The Wordsworth circle](#) 33.3 (2002).

¹⁸ Barbara Gelpi, in writing about these same passages in Darwin, but concerned more with the way the male gaze operates (*vis-à-vis* transference), reads Darwin’s aesthetic as suggesting a “version of the ancient doctrine of correspondences” (52). In this reading, breast-like aesthetic objects (“semi-real,” she borrows the term from Keats) form one-half of a symbol (type and anti-type) that is completed by the viewer (53).

¹⁹ cf. Robert Smithson’s famous artwork *Spiral Jetty* and Barry Boehm’s spiral model of software development.

²⁰ In reading this literature, one encounters the phrase “natural design” in place of the more common, and perhaps opposed, “intelligent design.”

For *Spiral Ecology*, see Dennis Rivers, “An Ecology of Devotion: A Personal Exploration of Reverence for Life,” [Earthlight](#), 49 (2003).. See also Kennedy and Kellert.

²⁰ See Timothy Morton, “Wordsworth Digs the Lawn,” [European Romantic Review](#) 15.2 (2004).

²¹ Dorothea Olkowski offers a striking critique of Deleuze’s ontology, specifically because his posit of a “dark precursor” locks us into de-territorializations and speed—strategies to move “quickly before flows are overtaken by the force of the capitalist socius, which seems to be the inevitable quasi-causality of the continuous manifold forming throughout history” Olkowski, [The Universal \(in the Realm of the Sensible\): Beyond Continental Philosophy](#) 6. Over and against this, Olkowski suggests slowness, interruption, interval.

²² Terry Eagleton, [The Ideology of the Aesthetic](#) (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 91.(91).

²³ See Gelpi, Kipp, Jacobus (in *Rebel Daughters*).

²⁴ Recall Darwin’s definition of “idea” at the beginning of *Zoonomia*: “those notions of external things, which our organs of sense bring us acquainted with originally...a contraction, or motion, or configuration of the fibres, which constitute the immediate organ of sense...Synonymous with the word idea, we shall sometimes use the words *sensual motion* in contradistinction to *muscular motion*” (6).

²⁵ Melanie Klein, in her essay “Love, Guilt, and Reparation,” builds on Darwin’s symbolization, but describes an already normalized process of introjection. She begins by acknowledging along with Darwin that “any round object may, in the child’s unconscious mind, come to stand for his mother’s breast.” She modifies this and moves it toward introjection (i.e. “growth”) by adding that by “a gradual process, anything that is felt to give out goodness and beauty, and the calls forth pleasure and satisfaction, in the physical or in the *wider* sense, can in the unconscious mind take the place of the ever-bountiful breast, and of the whole mother” Melanie Klein, Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works, 1921-1945 (London: Hogarth Press 1975) 333 my italics.

²⁶ Here Coleridge anticipates the work of object relations theorist Wilfred Bion who claims that thinking for the infant is a defensive gesture or mechanism, in no ways a priori or essential: “thinking has be called into existence to cope with thoughts...thinking is a development forced on the psyche by the pressure of thoughts and not the other way round” W. B. Bion, Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis. (London: William Heinemann Medical Books Limited, 1967) 111.

²⁷ Andre Green, in “The Dead Mother,” writes of one such situation of maternal distraction, ascribing to it an etiology of grief or loss; her bereavement creates among other things a “*quest for lost meaning*” for the infant, and the “*early development of the fantasmatic and the intellectual capacities of the ego.*” The infant feels a “*compulsion to imagine*” as well as a “*compulsion to think*” André Green, On Private Madness, International Psycho-Analytical Library. No. 117 (London: Hogarth, 1986) 152. In this way, aesthetic production is in dynamic relation to the primal loss of the “warmth of the maternal bosom.”

²⁸ This description of spatialized temporality is reminiscent of Lacan’s mirror stage. But unlike that account, in which the *imago* orients the subject in a “fictive” direction, Coleridge’s child recognizes another (not its own *imago*) *at the precise moment* that he recognizes its turn away. In a different essay, Lacan calls this process, the overlap and distortion created by encountering the enigma inside the other, the “alienating *vel*,” the space of non-meaning between the subject and the other: “The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child’s *whys* reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of adult, a *why are you telling me this?* ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult’s desire” (214 4 fundamentals).

²⁹ Coleridge’s attempt to get inside the mind of the infant treats the infant as a Lockean philosophical subject is ironically what he criticizes Wordsworth for in chapter 22 of *Biographia Literaria*. Phenomenologist Henri Bergson argues that all attempts to explain consciousness in this way are doomed to fail. He suggests instead that we move from the periphery to the center, explaining that for the child “if...all images are posited at the outset, my body will necessarily end by standing out in the midst of them as a distinct thing, since they change unceasingly, and it does not vary” (47).

³⁰ Henderson theorizes the flight from the mother’s body as such: “In the late 19th and early 19th centuries a child must, of necessity, resist a strong connection to its mother in order to establish itself as a self-made subject...The child that does not resist possession by the mother finds itself unable to become a complete subject precisely because it is positioned as an object, as a possessed being, in both the economic and the gothic sense” (37).

³¹ See Tilottama Rajan, Dark Interpreter : The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca, N.Y. :: Cornell University Press, 1980) 225-27, Julie A. Carlson, In the Theater of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Jerome J. McGann, The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 40-49.

³² Plotz’s focus in the chapter on Hartley Coleridge which ends her book *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* is the poet’s/parent’s solipsistic and narcissistic usurpation of the child’s life or autonomy: “However accurate Coleridge’s reading of his children’s feelings, his empathy most often was a tool of self-analysis. In general, Coleridge’s empathy sent him back to his own needy childhood and led him to use his children to help fill his need.” Plotz uses attachment theory to make these claims about S. T. C.—i. e. that he did not give Hartley what he needed because he was overly identified with him. She calls these kinds of parents “pre-occupied empathists.”

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- ³³ On incorporation see Joshua Wilner, Feeding on Infinity: Readings in the Romantic Rhetoric of Internalization (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).
- ³⁴ C.f. notebook: “Prayer / Speak of my Mother as teaching me to lisp my / early prayers” (Colburn – series 263, G 260).
- ³⁵ *BL* chapter XIV. See also Shelley’s depiction of the infant in “Defense of Poetry.”
- ³⁶ Rei Terada explains Coleridge’s theory of dreams by quoting from the notebooks: “‘The Understanding and Moral sense,’ cannot control the ‘terror’ of the nightmare ‘because it is not true Terror: i.e. apprehension of Danger, but a sensation as much as the Tooth-ache, a Cramp—I.e. the Terror does not arise out of a painful Sensation, but is itself a specific sensation” (269). See also Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams, and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge UP, 1989).
- ³⁷ See Daniel Robinson, “‘Work without Hope’: Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge’s Sonnets.(Critical Essay),” (Critical Essay) 39.1 (2000): 83.
- ³⁸ Ironically, in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge himself recognizes and comments on the constructed nature of our infantile connections: “The great fundamental Truths and doctrines of Religion, the existence and attributes of God, and the Life after Death, are in Christian Countries taught so early, under such circumstances, and in such close and vital association with whatever makes or marks *reality* for our infant minds, that the words ever after represent sensations, feelings, vital assurances, sense of reality—rather than thoughts, or any distinct conception. Associated, *I had almost said identified*, with the parental Voice, Look, Touch, with the living warmth and pressure of the Mother, on whose lap the Child is first made to kneel, within whose palms its little hands are folded, and the motion of whose eyes *its* eyes follow and imitate—” (237). Coleridge’s rhetoric here is arch. He doesn’t *almost* say “identified,” he says it. By putting the focus squarely on the pedagogical nature of the messages that make and mark our reality, Coleridge marks our own seemingly unending acts of imitation and introjection.
- ³⁹ “The Location of Culture” in *Playing and Reality*.
- ⁴⁰ Rosemary Ashton, The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography (Oxford, U.K. ; Cambridge, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 1996), Carlson, In the Theater of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women.
- ⁴¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Seamus Perry, Coleridge’s Notebooks: A Selection (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). 18
- ⁴² See also Brian Caraher’s account, which contextualizes Coleridge’s letters within the content and language of Wordsworth’s Lucy Poems (123-130).
- ⁴³ My claim for Coleridge’s “ambivalence” shares points of connection with Eric Wilson’s claim for Coleridge’s melancholia and Rei Terada’s claim for Coleridge’s dissatisfaction.

Chapter 4

Merging and Emerging in the Work of Sara Coleridge

Motherhood forces the woman to confront a new way of experiencing the object: the child, her first real presence, is neither an *ab-ject*...nor an object of desire...but the *first other*." -- Kristeva

I concluded the last chapter by arguing that S. T. Coleridge's theory of the symbol, which I redefine as his introjective aesthetics, founders precisely because introjection of the object is always-also introjection of the drive or ideology that underwrites it. This chapter pushes farther into the nineteenth century while it focuses on the work of Sara Coleridge, S. T. Coleridge's daughter. Like her father, Sara Coleridge was deeply attracted to imaginative states of detachment from the world. This tendency, along with several other factors, made it difficult for Coleridge to embrace aspects of her domestic role as mother and wife. In a sense, it put domesticity in conflict with poetic feeling. This chapter explores the tension in Sara Coleridge's writing between the engagement with others and a solipsistic retreat into self. Ultimately, I see tension as productive, not only in that it produced a valuable body of work, but also in that it demonstrates the power of writing to cause even the most isolated and lonely iterations to reverberate with presences—imagined, actual, and remembered.

I focus primarily on the years 1830-1835, years in which Colridge's "nervousness," diagnosed at the time as puerperal disease, the nineteenth-century's

precursor to post-partum depression, kept her mostly debilitated. Recent criticism on Sara Coleridge has suggested that her illness was primarily an unconscious “form of protest” against the sexism of the day (Mudge and Coleridge 63), which Coleridge then negotiated “on her own terms” (Marland 91). Regardless of the motivation of her illness (the issue seems to me undecidable) I am interested in the unique temporal and spatial imaginative spaces it opens up. Because Coleridge associated her illness with state of infancy, her often-cited but never published “Diary of her children’s early years” is pivotal for my argument in this chapter. It is a strange text, filled with accounts of (the children’s) bowel movements, teething, breastfeeding, weaning, and runny noses. It is also an account of weather, (her own) sleeplessness, nervousness, morphine addiction, and depression. The boundaries between separate states and bodies (Coleridge’s and her children’s), as well as the unique signification we tend to ascribe to individuals, become progressively fungible as the journal progresses. And although the process is more discontinuous, fraught with reversals and regressions, than I make it sound at present, her surviving children’s slow progression from human animals to reasoning subjects mirrors and precipitates Coleridge’s own recovery from a debilitating depression, her merging and her emergence, her journey that is, from dejected housewife-mother to editor-scholar-poet.

(It is important to state clearly at the beginning of this chapter that I am *not* speaking of Coleridge the person, per se, but rather the discursive Coleridge, whose project [or perhaps it is better to say, her textual body] is left to us in these strange generic forms—the infancy journal, poems, essays, the book of mourning, uncollected letters, and notes for projects seemingly left unfinished.)

Part 1:
Child as Father of the Woman

Coleridge oscillates continually in her writing between vivid small details and universal principles on the grandest scale. One result of this zeroing in and widening out is generic—that is, Coleridge writes in several genres so as to accommodate her dual interests in close empirical observation and philosophical speculation. We can hear her ruminate on the problem of the universal particular in the following passage.

¹ The context of the quote is a letter to her brother Hartley, himself the object of his father's intense observation and a character in several of his most famous poems. She acknowledges, in the process of describing her own children, the tendency for parents to project all of their desires, wishes, and unfinished business upon their children.

My father says that those who love intensely, see more clearly than indifferent persons; they see minutenesses which escape other eyes; they see “the very pulse of the machine.” Doubtless, but then, don't they magnify by looking through the medium of their partiality? Don't they raise undue relative importance by exclusive gazing—don't wishes and hopes, indulged and cherished long, turn unto realities, as the rapt astronomer gazed upon the stars, and mused on human knowledge, and longed for magic power, till he believed that he directed the sun's course, and the sweet influences of the Pleiades? 60

Sara Coleridge's figure of disordered machines or “deranged bodies,”² a critical construct that I will turn to later, is prefigured here in her citation of her father: “the very pulse of the machine.”³ Later in the passage, S. T. Coleridge's claim that love authorizes a heightened objectivity seems credibly refuted by his daughter's claims of parental projection. Clearly this is a critique of her father's apotheosis of Hartley to the role of the proto-typical romantic child. Yet even in the next paragraph of her letter, she herself describes an account of observing her son Herbert's first “attempt at

recollection” in a way that reproduces almost exactly a passage from her father’s notebooks describing an exchange with the childhood Hartley (to whom she is writing), in which he (S. T. C.) claims to have induced in the boy “an Abstract of *Thinking* as pure act & energy, of *Thinking* as distinguished from *Thoughts*” (21).

One implication of this reverberation—a generational superposition or “folding over” of persons, places, and histories—is that her writing, especially the journal of her children’s early years, acts as a space to inscribe the materiality of an unfolding present (daily mundane observations) even as it acts to *rewrite* Coleridge’s own early childhood. It attempts this in at least two ways. Formally, it resists her father’s empiricist observation of children (his “exclusive gazing”), while alternatively embarking on an empirical project in the dual hope of *experiencing* (not merely *seeing*) her children for who they are—that is, as part-animals. In this way, Coleridge’s embodied and “felt” impressions of her children resonate with recent feminist critiques of phenomenology for its privileging of vision over sound and touch (Olkowski “The End of Phenomenology: Bergson’s Interval in Irigaray”; Grosz).

Her lack of dogmatism regarding her methods also offers an oblique critique of her father’s claims to have “induced” anything in Hartley that wasn’t there to begin with.⁴ S. T. Coleridge’s observations of his children (see chapter 2) begin from an a priori conviction of what he expects to see—primarily, the evidence of Hartleyan associationism or Schillerian play.⁵ In other words, children are already always subjects. Coleridge, by making her bodily processes in her invalidism on par with the children’s, places herself at the child’s level, a pre-subjective space, from which she

is able to record, intuit, and send back messages. The second way in which Coleridge rewrites her own history is by reproducing in her journals the poems, projects, and even children's names from the past, thus intertextually working through her own complex biography. (I work through this formulation more thoroughly in the following sections on asceticism and mourning.)

To call S. T. Coleridge an empiricist and term Sara Coleridge's project as empirical is also to recognize the relative fluidity and mobility that, ironically, illness allows for Coleridge. She is dissociated from, yet trapped within her body, ostensibly the staging ground for her observations, or what Bergson terms the body's "privileged image" amongst other not-me images. Therefore, since her privileged image is no longer privileged, but rather merged with that of her children, her observations of the children and her own condition come not from a fixed place outside the real but strangely from a percipient trapped inside her percepts (for Bergson, there is always clear and necessary division between the virtual and the real).⁶ This sense of being trapped anticipates what I will address as Coleridge's extended asceticism, that is, the strange paradox that to be trapped (embodied, literally and figuratively—through social activity) is somehow to be freer.

This, I argue, is where her writing comes in. Her recovery is mediated by acts of writing, which is to say, it happens in a *space* that is also textual. Coleridge's illness, which she herself equates with infancy, opens up a spatial and temporal gap. And, as I argue in the introduction to the dissertation, children, especially infants, are themselves interruptions, whether they appear in poems or in what we call real life. They create spatial and temporal displacements, not only because they require

immediate and constant attention, but also because they evoke the future and the past simultaneously. I wrote in my last chapter that S. T. Coleridge's inability to cathect his own newborn son Hartley is productive insofar as Coleridge experiences the strangeness of the interruption for a full two hours, before, that is, he sentimentalizes the child at the mother's breast. Sara Coleridge on the other hand, perhaps due to her illness, remains at the same bodily level with the children in entry after entry in the diary—for *years*. While she experiences them as others, sometimes even threatening others, she also experiences them as indistinct from herself. Her own subjectivity gets rewritten from the ground up so to speak in this text. To borrow from Luce Irigaray, the children return her to the "zero" of her body ("This Sex Which Is Not One" 366). While this return is not a retreat—she never ceases to care deeply for and love her children—there is a strange distance that she maintains throughout many of her other texts of this period—songs, letters, diaries, and criticism. In her journal entries, essays and poems we witness Coleridge's attempts to slow the feedback loop that results from too much reverberation, spaces and distances that are constituted by Coleridge's dual need to merge with *and* to emerge from an intense identification with her children, who, as needy animals themselves, represent bodily needs and functions.

Mapping these psychic distances and interruptions makes visible four related problems, which I address in this chapter neither systematically nor equally. The first I've already touched on, namely, Coleridge needs to find a way to relate to her children without remaining identified with them. The second is the problem of address, that is, Coleridge's undetermined audience. This is two-fold problem. It is

psychological insofar as apostrophe and direct address in Coleridge's poems often seek to correct the past by addressing a doubled or uncertain addressee. In this way, poetics and psychoanalysis work hand in hand to show how *address can become redress*. Address also matters in that the gender proscriptions of the period challenge women writers to constitute new genres (the infancy journal, instructional poems for children, unpublished essays and poems, letters, etc.), which in turn invite serious questions about audience, which are also always questions about subjectivity, power, and agency.⁷ Third, there is the problem of the body. Other critics have rightly focused on this issue—especially as it concerns maternity in the nineteenth century—from the perspective of gender. I focus specifically on the philosophical / psychological / aesthetic consequences of making the body exterior to the self. Insofar as feminist criticism has shown how enlightenment philosophy makes women's bodies identical to all that lies outside the realm of reason, then Coleridge's strange rejection of her body provides a unique perspective from which to document the intense effects of these discourses. Furthermore, Coleridge's use of opium, or more specifically her *concern* regarding exposing her children to her use of opium, points to an anxiety about the mutability of body boundaries in ways that, to my knowledge, has never been treated in the criticism. The fourth and final problem concerns Coleridge's psychic economy of pleasure and pain. Often framed in religious terminology and never completely articulated, Coleridge's theory argues that it is morally more difficult, and therefore of greater value, to remain engaged in human affairs than it is to retreat into spiritual or artistic seclusion. Her theory of "extended asceticism" then keeps affect at the heart of what it means to be human.

Coleridge's unpublished essay on asceticism suggests that the past thoroughly infuses the present to such a degree that, often, to remain in the present is painful. And while Coleridge's moral and religious values require precisely such forbearance, her addiction to opium as well as her strict opposition of body and spirit, make it difficult to live up to her own creed. Paradoxically, I argue that Coleridge's failures, self-corrections, and adjustments are precisely what give her model credence and make it tenable as a workable aesthetics as well as ethical practice.

Coleridge's project as a writer, not to mention her mental health, requires a formal distance. In fact, she distances herself in several ways: from her father and his methods; from the animal nature of her children; and finally from her own debilitating sense of guilt for needing to build in that structural (psychological *and* physical) distance in the first place. Biographers have argued that S. T. Coleridge remained anguished by his inability to perform his duties as a parent. Perhaps in order to escape her own sense of guilt, Sara Coleridge needs to conceive of her children as separate from herself, "stars" and "suns" that have their own courses, powers, and one would imagine, salvation. So it is that the complex twinning of children, bodies, illnesses, and memory affects not only the content of her observations and critiques, but also the generic form those observations and critiques assume. As we will see, Coleridge's journal of her children's early years becomes a space for her to constitute herself—as a writer, as a mother, and as part of a symbiotic relational system (baby-mother). It begins with impartiality and, what was for the period, scientific rigor. Her commitment to an inclusive and evenly observed process—motivated perhaps by the sheer bodily fact of breast-feeding—means that

she includes herself within the circle of observation. What results is a disorienting sense of being merged with them. At times, there is no objective distance, except in the minimal distance required to make her daily notes. And the collapse of that distance happens not in the direction of projecting onto her children (as her father arguably does), but rather in the direction of feeling her children as animal presences, “snatching” at her, and draining her of her spiritual and mental well-being.⁸ In spite of her intense devotion and love of the children, that is, her own “medium of partiality,” the simultaneity of her invalidism and her children’s infancies results in a painful and, for her, untenable merging, at the level of the body, which is to say, at the level of *unreason*.

“Foreshaping” and the Problem of Address

Unreason for Coleridge, always already located at the affective level, seems to stimulate a fight or flight response. This is clearly at work in several of her poems. In November 1833, Coleridge lay sick and despairing in her mother’s bed in Hampstead. She was pregnant for the third time in as many years. She had been, in her own words, waging an unsuccessful “campaign” against morphine addiction. It was in this state that she dictated to her mother a poem, ostensibly, a verse epistle to her unborn child.

My babe unborn, I dream of thee,
Foreshaping all thy looks and wiles,
But Heaven’s light may close on me,
Ere I thy real face can see
Ere I can watch thy dawning smiles.

My older children round my heart
For many a day have been entwined:

yet dear to me, e'en now, thou art;
Fain would I do a Mother's part
Ere life and love are both resigned.

You will not droop, my precious dears,
When I am numbered with the dead:
You ne'er can know my cares and fears:
Your eyes will fill with childish tears,
Which o'er my grave will not be shed.

When others weep and mourn for me
That I no longer must be here,
Ne'er may they quench your childish glee;
No sadness ever may you see
To check the laugh of thoughtless cheer.

But when you gain reflection's dow'r
O ne'er thus joyless may you pine!
Ne'er may you know the anguished hour,
The sickening fears that overpower
This crushed but struggling heart of mine.

In dreams an airy course I take
And seem my tedious couch to fly:
Or o'er the bosom of the lake
Ere to captivity I wake,
My skimming boat I swiftly ply.

But nought my waking hours can bless –
I strive to sweeten Sorrow's cup;
'Tis all in vain, for ne'ertheless
I find it dregged with bitterness,
When to my lips I lift it up.

My griefs are not to be expressed:
Affection's voice can charm no more:
I ne'er shall find a steady rest,
Till, torn from all I love the best,
I seek the distant unknown shore.

Part proleptic love-letter in the vein of Anna Barbauld's "to a little invisible Being who is expected soon to become visible," part suicide note, in fact, only the first two stanzas are addressed exclusively to her unborn child—children, it turns out, twins

who lived only a few days. The next two stanzas seem to be addressed to all of her children, including Herbert, then aged three, and Edith, only one. The remaining three stanzas, a meditation on death, appear to be outside the mode of direct address altogether.

The difficulty in ascertaining precisely to whom the poem is addressed is further complicated by the fact that it exists in two versions. The first version, copied out by Coleridge's mother, bears the title "Verses by Sara Coleridge in Nervous Illness before the Birth of the Twins – November 1833 Hampstead. Copied by her dear mother." The second version, copied by Sara into her "Red Book" of poems bears the title "Verses written in sickness 1833, Before the Birth of Berkeley and Florence." Yet in that same book she also addressed it: "Sara Coleridge to her Husband, Mother and Children. Written on my Mother's bed, November 7th 1833, Hampstead." The specificity of this last dedication, including in the address her husband and mother, suggests that indeed it was written as a presage of death, as a goodbye letter of sorts. The foreshaping she imagines (I read "foreshaping" not merely as a dream-state but as an active form of imaginative labor) begins with a dream-vision, a conjuring of the face of her unborn child. Yet it quickly extends to a kind of stage-managing or directive to her mother and husband—the children must not *be* at her funeral: "Your eyes will fill with childish tears, / Which o'er my grave will not be shed." The weight of the proscriptive nature of these wishes is formally inscribed in the meter of stanza's four and five: "Ne'er may they quench your childish glee" and "Ne'er may you know the anguished hour." The triple meter and trochaic inversion ("Ne'er may they **quench**") that open the lines are unique in the poem, and

emphasize the force of the dictate. Furthermore, Coleridge amended these lines when she copied them out, changing “Ne’er *can* you know” to “Ne’er *may* you know,” making an even stronger case for reading them as proscriptive message, an appeal from a dying woman to her mother and husband to spare her children the suffering that comes with knowledge.

Coleridge correctively “fore-shapes” her children by imagining herself dead, her poem being read, and her wishes as fulfilled—thus effecting a sort of reach from beyond the grave. Perhaps the ambiguity of the addressee gives Coleridge some imaginative leeway insofar as she may have found it difficult to imagine a future at all in her state of hopelessness. Of course, the emendation (*can* to *may*) may also have been a kind of reverse construction, whereby the poet solves for the difficult fact that she was not to die before her children, but the other way around. But this explanation makes little sense if the poem were still primarily addressed to Berkeley and Florence, as surely they “can’t” know anything. And that they “may” know makes no sense within this context either.⁹ This reading then suggests that the addressees are more likely her remaining children. The point being that the reader cannot be certain.

Reading the poem in this way, as an unstable document precariously poised between complete openness (an unabashedly honest letter to her children) and emotional decorum or secrecy (a death-bed instruction to her husband and mother to protect her soon-to-be motherless children), foregrounds a pattern that recurs throughout Coleridge’s oeuvre, namely, a constant alternation between a wish for connection and a need to be disconnected. The tension produced by this double

desire is evident in the final stanza of the poem: “My grief’s are not to be expressed,” means that her grief is inexpressible—that is, that it is too immense or complicated to find expression in language—and that it *should not* be expressed, presumably because its expression would be injurious to the children—and, finally, that it won’t be expressed because she will have found the other shore, she will have died. As we will see, Coleridge’s Christian discipline also requires that such expressions of grief be limited, contained within the humility required by forbearance. Of course the grief *is* expressed discursively through the medium of the poem—an expression that Coleridge can’t seem to resist. There is an additional suggestion in the following line that affection—emotion, pain, complaint—is charming, in the archaic sense of that word, literally, that it charms, arrests, or fastens us. It follows then that Coleridge is not merely undecided as to whether to connect or disconnect, but also that she is literally trapped or fastened between two types of connection—the fascination of life and the fascination of death.

This tension between connection and disconnect, cathexis and decathexis, expression and stasis, is not merely sophisticated—it is tied inextricably to Coleridge’s alignment of nervousness, pain, anxiety, and hysteria with the animal nature of the body, whereas reason, spirit, and free will are located deep within the mind. In the essay “Nervousness,” Coleridge acknowledges a “sensuous part of the mind” that can be affected, but this part generally corresponds to mood; the judging part of the mind is left intact (Mudge and Coleridge 203). So it is striking to encounter the poem’s (perhaps unconscious) admission of “sickening fears that overpower” the heart. For even as a turn of phrase, it posits a relation between some interior or unconscious fear

and an exterior nervous symptom. Fear, in other words, is not only sickening (that is, disgusting), it is also a cause of sickness.

And while Coleridge argues in that same essay that free will is untouched by “nervous debility,” there seems, in fact, little agency or will in the poem at all. To the extent that there is conscious action in the poem, it takes the form of the perhaps ironic Tennysonian heroism that closes the final stanza: “I seek the distant unknown shore.” Her leaving, in other words, seems the result of a resigned choice to quit the bitterness of wakefulness, yet she stages herself as a Shellyean victim. The disappointment she feels with life makes itself felt in the phrase “When I no longer *must* be here.” Once again, the true irony of course is that it is not she who will be gone in a few short days but rather her twin children, the objects of her address. This inversion of child and parent points to a confusion that is at the center of Coleridge’s experience of motherhood; she cannot seem to easily distinguish where her children stop and she begins: consider the construction “My older children round my heart / For many a day have been *entwined*.” It seems as though the (bodily) feeling of being the locus of her children’s powerful need—what she herself called their “greediness”—was suffocating to Coleridge. As I have already suggested, her need to differentiate herself from the pull of her futurity, i.e. her children, is counterbalanced by a need to differentiate herself from specters of the past.

But what makes Coleridge’s case so singular is the extent to which she feels all of these pressures, remembered and imagined, as external, as surface. Even her body is included within this circle of externality, it is, in other words, *res extensa*. As Earl Griggs comments, Coleridge believed that it was her “nervous system, not her

rational being, [that] was temporarily deranged. As a matter of fact, her illness seems to have stimulated her imagination..." (116). Indeed, Coleridge speaks of her "nervous debility" as primarily an "earthly animal subject," something entirely foreign to herself, much like the weather, to which her sickness is so often compared and related. In nineteenth-century terms, the body is connected to the mind through the sensorium. When that link between body and mind is severed or damaged, when "reason fails, the animating principle which remains in man, the mere life, appears endowed with evil, bestial qualities, malice, treachery, ferocity, unmitigable cruelty..." (Coleridge and Coleridge v. 1: 163). Especially in their infancy, Coleridge's children appear to her as similarly animalistic or unreasoning, thus potentially frightening. The argument of "Verses written in sickness...", when read against journal entries and contemporary prose fragments, suggests that Coleridge feels a need to detach herself from her children, seeking refuge in a realm of almost completely hermetic "reason," in order to locate something like a self at the center of her experience.

Part 2:
"Disordered Machines":
Invalidism Equals Infancy

Begun in 1830, and continued intermittently until 1837, Coleridge's journal of her children's early years documents Herbert and Edith's breast-feeding, fevers, teething, and sleeping patterns. Most accounts of the journal treat its "obsessive" character as evidence of a strict adherence to the dictates of the child-rearing manuals of the day (Steedman 70). Typically, Elizabeth Gaskell's journal of her daughter's infancy is read along similar lines. Yet Bradford Mudge in *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian*

Daughter notices that at a certain point, reports of Coleridge's children's health are more and more interrupted by reports of her own nervous disorder. For Mudge, there seems to be a tipping point in the journal, after which it "becomes devoted almost wholly to her own [health]" (56.)

It is also possible, and, I argue, productive, to read the journal differently, that is, as it is labeled in her archive (by the looks of the handwriting, written by her daughter Edith), as the "Private Journal of S. C. in married time."¹⁰ By reading the journal this way, Coleridge doesn't merely insert herself into the narrative of her children's early years. Rather, the *children appear as an inseparable part of an unfolding sequence, an on-going notation of the workings and malfunctions of bodily machines*—"disordered machines" being Coleridge's own term for bodies under distress. This reading is messier of course, messier because what develops as a narrative (narrative, being perhaps another name for reading) is confused and discontinuous. Its terms and its personages crisscross, reverberate, and merge; baby, child, and mother become less and less distinct categories.

This ambiguity reflects a conflation by example in Coleridge's conception of her illness. In the essay "Nervousness," she uses infancy an analogue for invalidism, in which new states of bodily being must be learned, attained through a process of orientation, care, and slow development that is similar to early childhood.

...the patient's bodily frame is in a new state, a state of which he has not learnt to judge; an infant knows not its strength or its weakness or the capabilities of its body in any respect; in some sort a person whose nervous system is thoroughly deranged is in the same state...

Notice that the controlling conceit for the invalid is not healing, but rather rebirth, or even "organization," as the term was used in nineteenth-century natural sciences.¹¹

The identification of invalid and infant, with its insistence on “new capacities” suggests some potential spiritual or philosophical gains or compensations for invalidism, at least insofar as invalidism renders its victims more adaptable to future states of disorientation and altered perception.

Paradoxically, Coleridge forgoes a strict division between infant and nervous adult in order to insist on a strict division between animal, bodily processes and mental ones. The mind of the nervous patient, or at least one *part* of the mind, is trapped inside a body (and remember, affect and anxiety are always on the side of the body), which the mind of the sufferer has “not yet learned to judge.” The patient, like an infant, moves from one bodily “state” to another. In the best case scenario, the person who “learns” is a fixed reasoning subject that shuttles between these bodily states more or less unchanged. Judgment itself need not be impaired by nervousness.

Perhaps, by obsessively notating, inscribing the minutiae of the body in her journal, Coleridge hopes to “learn” to judge her new bodily state. She may also be attempting to “read” her children’s “messages.” In which case, their material excrescences become like signifiers, the body itself becomes a text. What necessarily takes precedent in any such hermeneutic are extreme bodily processes, those more likely to signify—feces, teething, fevers, rashes, nervousness, sleeplessness, and feeding.¹²

Granted, Coleridge’s symptoms *do* overtake the journal for a period. Yet even in periods during which she describes her condition as “hysterical,” there are always reports of the children and the detritus of their physical/animal natures. In fact, moments of extreme emotional distress (and remember for Coleridge, emotions are

primarily on the side of the body) are exceptionally well documented, and the important facts of the children's development are nearly always alluded to, even if they do not always receive the same exhaustive documentation. Two typical entries from 1833 read:

Feb 1. Last point of Herby's back tooth...through. I am very weak but not in bad...spirits. Baby well. Feb 2. Darling [Herbert] well. Baby had a good night. I slept very well – appetite good. Spirits middling...general languor greater than ever.
(Coleridge Diary of Her Children's Early Years)

Mudge's general claim is that Coleridge's journal should be read as yet another instance of her feeling hemmed in by her limited role as mother and housewife. Even so, I'm more interested in noticing the ways in which Coleridge negotiates this difficult passage—from a proscribed or received position within culture to a sense of autonomy—not by retreat from her children (although, as the poem above suggests, death does seem at times attractive in this regard) but rather first by identification, and then through the act of writing.

Coleridge's identification with her children is made possible, if not determined, by a conscious splitting of the self into an affective/bodily animal half and mental/spiritual reasoning half. Her description of her nervous debility suggests that she sees herself as hemmed in by the bodily/affective side, that is, by invalidism, a state Coleridge identifies with infancy.

Coleridge's initial collapse into identification with her children, her merging, makes it difficult for her to perform her maternal duties. As her own mother noticed in a letter, Coleridge often appeared to be a distracted and diffuse parent. To be fair,

this diffusion seems to have been isolated to certain aspects of Coleridge's parenting, or perhaps, in addition, isolated to certain particularly difficult times of her illness. In fact, she seems to have been completely dedicated and attentive to her children in most regards. I turn next to the question of connection and separation, an issue that takes on an ethical edge giving Coleridge's difficult experience with nursing.

Breastfeeding Morphine

According to experts, the merging I've been describing thus far forms an essential part of a healthy mother-child bond. Marion Milner points to the importance of having a "framed space and time and a pliable medium" to which the infant or small child can return, in order to feel temporarily a feeling of oneness (31).¹³ And while this merging, also made possible by certain aesthetic experiences, is said to be an essential component of the child's development, it is equally important for the mother's well-being to facilitate and tolerate merging. D. W. Winnicott sees psychological merging for the mother as an "extraordinary condition which is *almost like an illness*, though it is very much a sign of health" (The Family and Individual Development 15). In addition, the early enmeshment between mother and infant was recognized by nineteenth-century philosophy and psychology to be essential for the later development of sympathy in the child, and thus for the political and social wellbeing of the culture.¹⁴

The apotheosis of this ideal, of course, is the tableau of the baby at the mother's breast.¹⁵ Aside from the medical importance placed on breastfeeding in the nineteenth century, it also played an important social and cultural factor. Coleridge's

generation, as well as that of her mother's, were really the first to embrace the social and psychological value for the child of breastfeeding, specifically with its mother, rather than with a wet-nurse.¹⁶ Like most parents, Coleridge reads her children for signs of her own image. This is what she fears but also owns in her letter to Hartley quoted above. Yet the phrase "to see yourself in your child" takes on special meaning when we consider that breastfeeding literally connects the mother and child internally through the medium of her milk. This physical reliance of infant on mother complicates conventional philosophical accounts of infancy as a staging ground for interpersonal relations or subject development insofar as there can be no full autonomy, no space for the recognition of the other, at least on this level of literal physical interconnectedness or mutuality.¹⁷ When milk is literally flowing from mother to baby ("what a fountain I was") there is no outside to the connection.¹⁸ It would be more accurate to describe the nursing mother-infant pair as an intra-personal relation.

It is not simply that distance disappears inside the mother-infant bond. It may also be that Coleridge rejects the "archaic...sense-relation to the mother's body," an empty ideology or what Luce Irigaray calls a "regressive emotional behavior," simply the flip side of the law of the father ("This Sex Which Is Not One" 365). While Coleridge's merging at some points risks becoming complete immersion, it seems she cannot tolerate the stereotypical relation of mother to infant, precisely insofar as it is an *exclusive* "privileging of the maternal over the feminine" ("This Sex Which Is Not One" 367). On this reading, the body, often put forward as the space of radical heteronomy and difference and when it is defined as *exclusively* a maternal body,

seems indeed to be oppressive. Over and against this exclusive maternal body, reason, for Coleridge, takes on added significance. It designates the ability to choose. In this way reason presages and forms the ground for Coleridge's concept of extended asceticism. Opium, insofar as it insinuates itself to the point of addiction, occludes reason, when reason is defined as the ability to choose. Infants and illness, like opium addiction, operate outside of the parameters of reason, at least insofar as they foreclose through their form on the possibility of choice.

Indeed the infant, especially at the point which it is breastfeeding and is merged with the mother, seems entirely outside of reason, at its most human (in terms of its iconic and symbolic status in our stories of human development) *and* its most animalistic. This animality, as I have stated above, is a problem for Coleridge, insofar as bodies, animals, emotion, and nervousness all exist on the other side of rationality. Nursing requires that Coleridge relinquish her tenacious hold on reason. This is doubly risky insofar as this particular form of merging entails the becoming-human of the infant while at the same time it suggests a reciprocal becoming-animal of the mother.

Yet there are further risks in the case of Coleridge. Very early in her nursing of Herbert, her first child, Coleridge expresses concern over the transmission to the baby of something harmful in her breast-milk. She writes of the baby's bowel movement's being "copious" and "discolored...owing to *my* state no doubt" (my emphasis). She reasons that she must "wean him sooner than I wished," even though the "milk is still good and abundant," because he is dissatisfied with breast milk and wants solid food. Why she must wean him in that case is unclear. Especially since

elsewhere she acknowledges that there are non-nutritional advantages to breast-feeding, such as comfort, pain management (as with teething), and general psychological development. She could of course simply supplement the breastfeeding with solid food. Yet she writes at about this time of feeling unwell and having to take the “clectuary,” which, she reports, “answered well.” Even in 1830, the term was archaic, and reserved for combinations of poison. Mudge reports that Coleridge had been using morphine regularly since 1825, and by the mid-1830s would have been “addicted.” So it seems fair to assume that it was not her “state”—that is, her nervousness or anxiety—that she worried about passing on to her children, but rather, her cure.

While it is true that Coleridge, and others, worried about how breast-feeding impacted her fragile health, potentially sapping her already waning inner strength, it seems likely from the evidence that she was also worried about passing the laudanum and morphine on to her children. She writes: “I have a slight cold which may affect him. I took morphine with cream and tartar on his account. It answered without acting like medicine on him.” Granted, any virus or infection could be harmful to infants during this period. And yet her logic here is still quite dizzying. She must take the morphine to treat the cold, which may affect him. But of course the accompanying concern is that the morphine may affect him “like medicine.” Not surprisingly then, she writes next that “he sleeps now from 20 minutes to eight till 6 or 7 in the morning.”

These types of notations in the journal, anxiously remarking the symbiotic relationship between baby and mother, are constant throughout. Coleridge registers

her nervous “spells” in the journal by writing that she is “taken.” In many of these accounts, reports of the children follow: “This morning I was taken after nearly 5 weeks [presumably 5 weeks without any nervous spells]. Baby’s motions were discolored on this account.” The discoloration of his bowel movements “on account” of her being taken must surely be a reference to the opium she *takes* in response to being *taken*, a treatment that surely passes via breast-milk from mother to child.¹⁹

As Marland points out, Coleridge, like other mothers suffering from puerperal sickness, was advised to separate herself entirely from the household routine and from her children in order to recover. It was such a journey “westward,” one that incidentally did nothing to cure her sickness, which provided the fortuitous occasion for Herbert to be weaned.

Edith’s breast-feeding was even more difficult: “My nervous debility and other unpleasant symptoms increased so much that I was obliged to think seriously of feeding my darling (she now takes milk and oates [sic] with a little sugar in it) out of the bottle.” Coleridge seems worried about how not nursing will affect Edith, but consoles herself with the fact that the opium was not having *too* negative of an effect: “her bowels are right – though her motions are often windy.” Finally, “Edith sucks no more today alas! Since the 12th I have been going on very badly. Disordered bile accompanied with derangement of the nervous systems is my complaint” (see Mudge 56). When she speaks of her concern over Edith, it is difficult to tell whether the concern centers on Edith’s adjustment to the bottle or the affects of the morphine or on both.

Not knowing when my confinement will go I resolved yesterday evening to give up nursing her—I had begun again to do so three

times. Missed the third sucking and today she had and will have nothing from me. May God protect and help her. I think I have done the best for her and perhaps also for myself...

The intensity of her connection with the baby, the comfort and health-giving properties that breast-feeding represents—all of these are only replaceable by God's protection and help. She writes to her husband at this time that she takes as consolation the fact that Edith hadn't started teething yet, at which point stopping nursing would have been an even greater loss to the child. Yet even two days after weaning, Coleridge is still concerned over what might have passed from her to the child: "Yesterday morning baby had another very green motion...I trust it was only the remains of my bile" (22). In a strange reversal, her own mother [Sara Fricker Coleridge] was called upon to drain the milk from her breasts. Signs of Coleridge's guilt are clearly evident in a note from later that week, which remarks that Edith, although "go[ing] on well," is "greedy in sucking" the bottle and is "scarce satisfied" with it.

These concerns are expressed obliquely in a children's poem, never published, and written at about this time:

To Baby Edith

Good morn to Darling Edith
Whom Nurse so fondly feedith:
 May all she eats
 Be filled with sweets
And sweet the life she leadeth!

The Cow must be no rover,
But she shall feed on clover,
 And cowslips sweet
 Her lip shall meet
Whose milk for thee runs over.

They bread shall all be wheaten,
Well soak'd before 'tis eaten:
 And white as pearl
 For my baby girl:
The baker must be a neat one.

The Elves in fire who frisk it,
Shall ne'er burn baby's biscuit:
 Nor give it a scorch
 With fiery torch,
Nor into the ashes whisk it.

Presumably, this poem is one of the poems excluded from publication in *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children*. She repeats several of the rhymes and ideas in the poem “Herbert’s Beverage” from *Pretty Lessons...*²⁰ Purity and hygiene are the main concerns of the poem. Coleridge, by stopping breastfeeding, relinquishes control over what goes into her daughter. Coleridge’s concern about her own becoming-animal on account of her connection to the children gets refracted into a concern about her daughter’s becoming-human.²¹ Will Edith receive the requisite comfort and support from Nurse and Cow and Baker and Elf? Notice that the mother is written out of the scene. The recursivity implied by a cow that eats cowslips (we hear cow’s lips in part because of the “lip” in the following line) points to an obsessive doubling evident elsewhere in the poem—primarily in the double, triple and quadruple rhymes. Notice how the dimeter couplets [“And white as a pearl / For my baby girl] are enfolded by the trimeter lines with their triple rhymes. Is this doubling a mimetic inscription of the missing mother-child couple?

To my knowledge, there is only one version of this poem. In the manuscript Coleridge begins with the scratched-out line “*Farewell* my dear little Edith.” The change to “Good morn to Darling Edith” is striking. What type of farewell is being

offered in the first iteration? It is as though the bond of enmeshment is so strong that to wean Edith is tantamount to leaving her. The fantasy of disconnection, of leaving, is similar to the fantasy of dying in “Verses Written in Sickness...” Yet here, Coleridge imagines releasing Edith into a world of increasing strangeness and danger—from nurse to cow to baker to elf. The final stanza of the poem revives the figure of the spirit in the flame from her father’s “Frost at Midnight.” But unlike the flickering ember, these elves are not half-created by fancy, but rather are ominous figures who threaten to whisk the biscuit into the flames. The alliteration in the line “burn baby’s biscuit” make it almost seem as though they could burn baby and whisk her into the ashes as well.

At the same time as Coleridge recognizes the therapeutic effects of nursing, she also sees her role as the mother to the infants as contributing to her nervous condition. In fact, she seems much happier and better suited for motherhood once the children are verbal and can be appealed to rationally. In the same letter to her husband in which she announces weaning Edith, she writes that the “darling Edith has sucked her mama’s strength indeed!—for two months what a fountain of milk I was!” As though concerned that she had imputed to the children the cause of her illness, she quickly follows, “But other untowardnesses conspired to weaken me.” Grammatically, it is hard to determine whether or not the children are contained with the appellation “untowardnesses.” Either way, the anxiety of passing nervousness and / or opium from one generation to the next ironically doubles her own situation vis-à-vis her father.

Whether or not her own children are a burden, clearly she feels immense guilt over failing in her maternal duties. Two years after she stopped breastfeeding she writes a poem that revises her choice not to stop feeding into a material fact of her infirmity, writing that “weakness laid me low / And dried that fount and bade mine eyes o’er-flow / With fruitless tears that on thy couch I shed / And wish’d them pearls to crown thy precious head” (Coleridge and Swaab 87). As her letter to her husband suggests nothing dried the “fount” of breast-milk. Rather, she made a difficult choice, one that caused her “eyes” to overflow. In an imaginary hydraulic displacement (remember her own claim to be a fountain for her children), the usefulness of breast-milk is exchanged for “fruitless” tears. Later in this poem she imagines herself unable to care for the children in any fashion. Her one wish is that her children see only reflections of beauty in her tears and not her sorrow. This wish is paradoxical if not disingenuous, insofar as she writes these wishes in the form of poems for her children. Surely, just as in “Verses Written in Sickness,” they will read them and have the knowledge from which she wishes to keep them safe.²²

This double wish is crucial, for as her most well-known shorter lyric “Poppies” suggests, her children, in their innocence (which is now may identical to their ignorance), cannot know her unhappiness or ill-health—in this case, indexed by poppy flowers.

The Poppies blooming all around
My Herbert loves to see;
Some pearly white, some dark as night,
Some red as cramasie:

He loves their colours fresh and fine,

As fair as fair may be;
But little does my darling know
How good they are to me.

He views their clust'ring petals gay,
And shakes their nut-brown seeds;
But they to him are nothing more
Than other brilliant weeds.

O! how shouldst thou, with beaming brow,
With eye and cheek so bright,
Know aught of that gay blossom's power,
Or sorrows of the night?

When poor Mama long restless lies,
She drinks the poppy's juice;
That liquor soon can close her eyes,
And slumber soft produce:

O then my sweet, my happy boy
Will thank the Poppy-flower,
Which brings the sleep to dear Mama,
At midnight's darksome hour.

The emphasis is different than in “Verses written in Sickness...” There, the children were capable of the knowledge of her imagined death. That poem, tending toward the performativity, uses the imperative *may* they ne’er know. But in “Poppies” Herbert cannot know his mother’s addiction to opium, not because of secrecy or edict, but because the “sorrows of the night” are beyond his happy comprehension. He is, in other words, categorically different. His happiness, stems from his animal—i.e. physical—ignorance. Mudge writes that the “issue is not simply one of knowledge.” Rather he reads in the poem evidence of “maternal self-sacrifice,” which “suggests a causal relationship between Herbert’s health and his mother’s illness, between his pampered innocence and her misery” (66). This interpretation is in keeping with Mudge’s general reading of Coleridge’s ambivalent relationship towards domesticity

and motherhood. He reads the final stanza, in which Herby thanks the poppies for his mother's sleep, as suggesting that he finally "ironic[ally]" understands the "parental price paid" for his happiness.

Yet the ironic reversal at the end of the poem is not so much one in which innocence is traded for knowledge, but rather one in which animality is traded for reason. Implicit in that reversal is an exchange of features and figurations between mother and infant. Beginning with the penultimate stanza, the poem switches subject position such that we see now from Hebert's eyes. Herbert's main phenomenological mode in the poem is visual.²³ He "loves to *see*" the flowers; he *views* them with eye and cheek so bright. As the narrative voice in the poem slides toward the third person—"poor mama long restless lies"—so too the scene of the poem shifts from outside to in, presumably to Coleridge's bedroom. I want to suggest that the reversal becomes complete when the narrator drinks the "poppy juice," here associated with Herbert (his love, his touch ["he shakes" them], his look). As I indicate above, Coleridge was concerned about her own administration of opium to Herbert via her breast-milk: "It answered without acting like medicine on him." In "Poppies" it is almost as though he administers the opium to her, in order to bring sleep to "dear mama." She is asleep. In the temporal procession of the poem, he is awake: "O' then my sweet my happy boy / Will thank the poppy flow'r / Which brings the sleep to dear mama / At midnight's darksome hour." It is as though Coleridge suckles the flowers, which like her breast-milk, are indices of the animal/vegetable world that infancy and invalidism represent.

Mudge is right in recognizing a relationship between Herbert's health and Coleridge's illness. Yet I would shift the focus slightly, from resentment to merging. The merging between mother and child still happens in the poem, but it happens differently than in the journal. It is a second order representation, aestheticized and imagined, rather than merely reported. In "The Poppies," Herbert feeds his mother, much as she had done him. And while Coleridge struggles continually to free herself from the becoming-animal her infant children represent, she refuses a simple dualism. And even though she is made extremely uncomfortable by her bodily symptoms, she insists upon "affectivity" as a crucial aspect of all human existence. The distinction between infantilism / invalidism / animality and reason is a difference worked out by Coleridge in a religious, moral, and aesthetic refusal of asceticism, one that reveals a paradoxical commitment to the physical world.

Part 3: The Limits of Formal Asceticism

So far I have been arguing that Coleridge often finds herself trapped between two competing modes of being—a spiritual, interior mode, and an animal / bodily, external one. The first yearns to disconnect and flee all things of the body. The difficult fact that to flee her body means also to abandon her children makes any embrace of pure spirit an ambivalent one at best. Pure exterior being, on the other hand, is for Coleridge, not being at all but rather a state of unreason tantamount to imprisonment inside of an insatiable and unknowing body. It is however a form of knowledge, a principle, that finally forms the crucial bridge in Coleridge's thinking between these two dichotomous modes of being. Knowledge or principle, what

Coleridge calls an asceticism “extended” into the world, mediates between these positions through the activity of writing—an act that foregrounds process and principle over and against habit and the capriciousness of the body.

Opium stands in a strange relation to writing, insofar as it is often associated in her poetry with a kind of imaginative *knowing* that would seem to exclude the body rather than relate it to the spirit. That is, it seems to take Coleridge out of the world. So whereas in the medical discourses of the nineteenth century (Brown, E. Darwin, etc.), nervous debility is located on the side of the body and therefore can be effectively treated with opium, for Coleridge, opium is itself connected to what we might call “pure reason,” a kind of bodily flight toward interiority and spirit. This tension, is never to my knowledge resolved in Coleridge, but rather forms another point at which body and spirit, extension and retreat must contend.²⁴

Discursive knowledge on the other hand, specifically the writing Coleridge does in order to map the emotional, psychic, and bodily territory of her illness and the children’s infancy, ironically saves her from the bodily pull of her children. She can merge with them through the medium of books and writing, yet she can also *emerge* in her own right. But this strategy or method is not sufficient in and of itself. Coleridge must theorize the relation between these two modes in moral and religious terms.

In an unpublished essay entitled “Thoughts on Asceticism” Coleridge outlines a philosophy that addresses precisely the ethical dilemma of one’s relation to the body. In that essay, she foregrounds the problems of lived experience—that is to say, the problems of bodies, which is also the problem of relating to other people. The

longer title, “Thoughts on Asceticism by a ‘Rationalist,’ in search of true Religion, or rather in search of a true *form* of faith already found,” points directly to the emphatic importance Coleridge places on the problem of form. Writing in response to a quote from her friend Aubrey De Vere, Coleridge allows that there are “two essentially different kinds of Christian excellence.” The first, and the one De Vere aligns himself with, is physical asceticism, the typical renouncing of bodily pleasures that we generally have come to associate with the term. Coleridge affirms that we must all seek Christian perfection, and must, if it is required for salvation, “absolutely abandon...the good things of this life.” She calls this model, the traditional one, “formal” asceticism. But, perhaps because of her long history of physical and emotional illness, Coleridge is quick to point out that the “bodies of some require more rest and nourishment than others.”

This qualification opens up the space for a second kind of Christian excellence, one that is more nuanced and, arguably, more difficult to practice. It involves “extending” into world, into the social realms—as Coleridge writes, it entails “having all things as having them not.” The reason that this “extended” asceticism is preferable is because on the one hand, pure asceticism is not possible—it is only pure if it leads to complete abandonment of the world, in other words, death (and here we see the stakes for Coleridge inasmuch as I have already commented on her deep attraction to this form of martyrdom, the death-as-excellence, excellence-as-death). On the other hand, extended asceticism is harder. It requires more of the will and of surrendering attachment, than does the formal or pure ascetic practice: “to hold the good things of our present estate with so temperate a hand as never to abuse them,

ever to be prepared to forego them” is “a more refined and complicate scheme of asceticism.” Furthermore, extended asceticism is “seldomer carried out” than its formal version.

It is possible to read this theoretical construction back over Coleridge’s difficult period of illness and merging with her children.²⁵ In other words, there is a sense in which her aversion to the animal aspects of being (hysteria, unreason, etc.) resembles, were it to result in a *complete* renunciation of the body, a formal asceticism. Yet Coleridge rejects the rejection of the body as being “too easy” and, in modern life at least, ethically questionable. For she writes that the “formal ascetic,” presumably for ethical reasons pertaining to his “duty” or responsibility, “cannot leave houses and lands & wife & children for his heavenly master’s sake.” It is also not morally superior, and I take this to be the crux of Coleridge’s argument, to “decline possession” of worldly goods “from the first,” because to let go without knowledge of what you are releasing would not be as “salutary & searching an exercise as to resign them when once enjoyed.”

Here I think we can hear an echo of how *knowledge of what is lost* functions in Coleridge poetry. Herbert and Edith cannot know the depths of spiritual loss and suffering because they are still closer to human animals than to human subjects. Coleridge’s attempts to reach and teach them, to inform them of what is lost (to “foreshape” it for them), fail when they are entirely performed by the body—breastfeeding, holding, physical nurturance, etc. Nor can reason reach them directly. Therefore, she reaches to her children from the realm of knowledge—that is, through the futurity of her writing.

Coleridge's essay on asceticism reverses the terms such that what we would normally consider the more spiritually and physically demanding path—that is, formal asceticism—is, in a sense, a retreat from bodies, specifically the human-animal bodies of other people, and therefore, short-circuits the need for spiritual principles and growth. Whereas, again, in a stunning reversal, extended asceticism is in fact a difficult “being with” others, extended socially and physically into their space, the common space of mother and child being only own example.

A spiritual education must be one of continued effort and struggling—a contest with our merely human self must be forever going on & can only cease to be painful when self is annulled & and then the contest is over—But the question is whether this strengthening struggle, this purifying pain, may not go on even more efficaciously & and with safer and more edifying accompaniments in a soul that has entered into human life in its most extended scale...

The most extended scale is that of embodiment. For the infant, the soul “enters” human life once it is perceived by another and can return that recognition. For the Christian, extended asceticism means connections with others, and, if we are to follow Coleridge to the next logical step, then connection with those we love is even more important because those relationships teach us what it is we must be prepared to renounce. Thus, when Coleridge must give up breast-feeding, she follows each mention in her journal—for Herbert as well as for Edith—with “may God protect and keep” them. What makes this interaction so painful is that Coleridge *knows* how beneficial breastfeeding is for Edith, both physically and emotionally. Yet she makes a conscious choice, informed by her extension into human life. As “Farewell my darling Edith,” the rejected first line of “To Baby Edith” suggests, the sacrifice, if we may call it that, that Coleridge makes is so painful as to feel like a kind of death or

leave-taking. “Strengthening struggle” then becomes a middle position, a principle. So if the merging of breast-feeding is in part interrupted by fears of injuring her children by her opium addiction, then to renounce that connectedness is, for Coleridge, to enact a struggle. It is an ascetic and Christian act.²⁶ It insists on recognizing the embodiment of spirit (its extension) even as it recognizes the ethereal and safe dimensions of formal or pure bodily asceticism.

Coleridge’s asceticism has another value in that in practice it responds to the needs and wills of other people as well as to the vicissitudes of specific situations. For although she found a more workable relation to her children through language and learning—that is, in and through reason *instructed by principle*—the improvisatory demands of Coleridge’s extended asceticism, the readjustments necessary when a soul enters into human life in its most extended scale, require her to constantly renegotiate her relationships, principles, and methods.

This improvisatory ethics also informs her approach to the children’s education. She writes to her husband in a letter from 1835 that Edith, then a mere four years old, would not cooperate in her evening lesson. She would not say the word “the,” “which she had said a hundred times before.” Frustrated, Coleridge gave the child “a rap on her hand with the brush handle.” Still the child “continued in her obstinate mood,” and would not say the word, although “she sobbed...hysterically.” Coleridge is obviously pained by the exchange. In one sentence, she is unapologetic about her stern measures. Yet four lines later, she writes that “I quite sickened at the sight of that brush when I came up here again—I think I will throw it away.” Adopting a more philosophical tone, she writes that if the punishment does not yield

results, she must take a “different tack,” a “slow method” that makes “no *point* of her [Edith] saying certain words.” What interests me here is not the harsh discipline per se, nor the subtler shift toward coercive, patient, slower inculcation; rather I’m interested in Coleridge’s emotions surrounding her attempts to chasten Edith, that is, her awareness of her own affective states. She later writes that later that night “Dear Edy” came to bid her good night. “She looked perfectly affectionate and sweetly free from all resentment. This makes my tears flow—but they are tears of relief and comfort.” The change in tense—“she *looked*...this *makes*”—suggests that Coleridge cries when recalling the incident, not in front of Edith. In other words, her feelings center not primarily on her relationship with Edith per se, but rather on her concerns about Edith’s well-being and the nature of her moral education.²⁷

Yet even Coleridge’s relief and comfort are not resting places for her principles. To decide permanently on corporal punishment simply because it appears to have done no harm to Edith would be to close down or concretize judgment in an act resembling formal asceticism. Coleridge describes such philosophical closure derogatorily in the letter to her husband as “a regular routine which [is] never correct[ed] by principle.” In contrast, Coleridge’s own extended asceticism responds not merely to outcomes but also, and finally, to principles. In the case of Edith and the hairbrush, the adjustment is so decisive and quick that although Coleridge writes the night of the incident that she will try punishing Edith in this way for “3 months at least,” the following day she writes her husband that she will forego the punishment, put her trust in “no method of discipline,” and that her “whole aim is...the growth of [the children’s] souls in goodness and holiness.” She accepts that she must put her

“faith in no ways and means which I have power over,” but rather must trust “the influence of good example.” As Griggs writes of Coleridge’s theory of parenting, “If self-control on the part of adults were lacking, what good...would religious instruction be?” (81)

The principles of a strictly formal asceticism when extended into domestic relations would suggest retreat, either from hairbrushes or elocution lessons, or both. But that is precisely the point: formal asceticism *cannot* be extended to domestic relations. It would not be able to bear the difficult and painful corrections and surrenders that extended asceticism allows. It exists on the level of hermetic dogmatism. It does not and cannot enter into human life. So it is that in a strange reversal, Coleridge ends up with bodies and spirit, outcomes and principles, crashing about in an improvisatory dialectic, never coming to rest, but inching forward through what she terms the “indwelling” spirit, which paradoxically extends into the lives of other people.

The Future in the Past

The domestic turn in Coleridge’s theology, poetics, and philosophy are part and parcel of what Mudge describes as her “attitudes about female authorship” (10), that is, her tendency to defer to her father or others when literary accomplishment was to be acknowledged. Yet paradoxically, as we have seen, these deferrals allowed for a more deeply engaged ethics, while also producing several interesting genres of writing. Among Coleridge’s literary remains—a strangely appropriate term—are two volumes which bear the title “Book of Mourning.” These books, into which Coleridge copied several poems (her own, and as we shall see, other’s) as well as

remembrances of the recently dead, begin with her husband's death and continue on registering the deaths of family members and notable friends through to the end of her own life. Initially, it strikes one that the death of her infant children do not warrant a mention, or rather that the mourning that is surely a part of all of Coleridge's writing, begins with the death of her husband and not that of her children or her father. Of course it matters deeply that for the most part in the nineteenth century children were not thought of as appropriate subjects for which to mourn.²⁸ And while this is obviously the case, it is also the case that the century is filled with child elegies. It is also striking that any of the texts I have looked at in this chapter could easily have been included in a volume called the "Book of Mourning."

In "Verses Written in Sickness," Coleridge mourns the loss of her children, not because they would die soon after childbirth (which they did), but rather because she believed that she would die and thus would not be present in their lives. More to the point, as I have stressed, neither mother nor child would know *what it was* they had lost. She would not have seen them, except as foreshaped, and they would not have knowledge of her suffering. In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud suggests that it is not merely that we mourn the loss of the other, but also that we cannot know quite what it is for us *in* the other that we have lost. Thus a sort of double mourning takes place. Likewise, the journal of her children's early years, recording as it does Coleridge's daily suffering and sense of loss, could also be called a book of mourning precisely because the illogic of its grammar—a confusion, that is, about who or what is the subject and who or what is the object.

The question of confusion extends to Coleridge's literary afterlife: exactly to what genre do these works belong? The back cover of Vol. 1 of "Book of Mourning" is covered with writing and design. Written in what looks like a cross between a school-girl's doodling and an exercise in free-association are the words "Loss of friends...death...Grave" and "mourning." Again, one expects that Coleridge would extensively mourn the death of her father here. Instead, we have only a short mention of S. T. Coleridge. There are quite a few entries on the death of her husband and mother. Yet when Hartley dies, she writes, "but for the children, I should long to go too." This qualification is telling. She does not imagine some distant shore for which momentarily she will sail. Instead, her extended asceticism marks the distance between one desire (to be with the dead) and another (to be among the living). Coleridge enters into human life by choosing to stay with the children. In the logic of extended asceticism, making a *knowledgeable* choice makes all the difference. In other words, she must know the pleasures of "longing to go" (notice she does not say she would die "but for the children"; rather, that she would "long to go"), in order for her to make a meaningful decision to remain. Again, for Coleridge, mourning then takes on an ethical character in that it requires knowledge of what is lost, and then a conscious choice to enter into human life. This must be done over and over again. It is not a system with *a priori* rules or an absolute formal structure to be applied: asceticism does not "belong inseparably to any system of outward acts." Rather, principles must be considered as part of an on-going process.

Mourning, like extended asceticism reaches across generations. A desire to reach back to one's past, to actively mourn, but more importantly to "discern" what

has been lost, is evinced in the final two entries in “The Book of Mourning.” There Coleridge copies out two poems by her mother Sarah Coleridge from before her birth. The first was written during the sickness of Berkeley Coleridge, Sara Coleridge’s brother who died three years before she was born. The second concerns his death at eleven months old. (It is important to recall Coleridge’s own poem “Verses written in Sickness...” in which she names one of her unborn twins Berkeley, presumably after her deceased brother.) The series of associations and connections between these poems is thick. Consider that Sarah Coleridge copied out her daughter’s poem and was presumably present at the death of her grandson, named after her own beloved Berkeley. After her mother’s death, Sara Coleridge then copies her mother’s poems into her *own* book of mourning, poems in which her mother details her suffering over the loss of her (Sara’s) older brother.

While extended asceticism, at least insofar it relates to mourning, reaches into the immemorial past, the poems themselves do not melancholically incorporate their loss. Both poems by Sarah Coleridge insist on letting go of their object, that is, of Berkeley, the logic being that if an event truly is God’s will, which is to say, if it *happens*, one must accept the brute fact of its occurrence. Retreating from the physical plane, that is, giving oneself over to formal asceticism, saves one from the pleasures and pains of attachment. At the risk of belaboring what seems obvious, to suffer loss, one must first be attached. This is the logic of extended asceticism: “to hold the good things of our present estate with so temperate a hand as never to abuse them, ever to be prepared to forego them.”

Her mother, in “on the lamentable sickness of little Berkeley during his father’s absence in Germany, 1799,” writes

Oh, interpose, kind heaven, thy succors lend!
Put forth thy hand, my drooping infant save,
In mercy spare what thou in mercy gave!—
But if his doom is that of David’s son;
I from the earth arise, and say thy will be done. (14-18)

Clearly, Sarah Fricker Coleridge is neither the poetic equal of her husband or her daughter. Yet the lines contain the barest contours of her daughter’s extended asceticism, in this case offered for the sake of her dead brother. “Thy will be done,” Coleridge’s own epithet, now takes on an added valence or at least it assumes a longer timeline. Berkeley’s death in many ways marked the death of her parent’s marriage, at least insofar as her mother never forgot her grief and her father his displaced sense of guilt. The continuation and generation of this loss, its specificity, is connoted by these poems’ strange inclusion in Coleridge book of mourning.

In the last poem copied out, “On the death of little Berkeley Coleridge – 11 months old,” Sara Fricker Coleridge transposes something like extended asceticism into accusatory wrath:

Samuel, thy dire forbodings are fulfilled;
Death’s clay-cold hand our beauteous boy hath chilled.
Ah, where art thou, unconscious father, where?
Whilst thy poor Sarah weeps in sad despair?” (13-16)

Does daughter Sara mourn or scorn her father with the inclusion of the poem? Does she mourn the brother she never met? her mother? her own dead children? Does she mourn the past that she did not have? In a certain sense, the inclusion of this poem—in many ways, an indictment of her father—in her own book of mourning means

letting the “unconscious father” go while keeping him with her, that is, within the pages of her book.

Extended asceticism requires entering not simply into human life, but also into certain conventions and genres. As we can see, the genres themselves are changed as part of this activity. So, I would argue are concepts such as “illness,” “faith,” and “hope.” Consider Coleridge’s later poem “For my Father on his lines called ‘Work Without Hope’”:

Yet Hope still lives, and oft, to objects fair
In prospect pointing, bids me still pursue
My humble tasks: – I list – but backward turn
Objects for ever lost still struggling to discern.

Clearly, Coleridge’s professional anxiety is still with her. She has no more lost it than she has retreated from the full extension of human activity. Her tasks are “humble,” and she both lists (that is, catalogues) and lists (that is, she drifts without purpose). Hope lives. But what she dares to hope for in this state is still to be determined. The struggling, of which she so approves, speaks of a desire to discern objects. Whereas her merging with her children seemed to arrest or seal up time altogether, now, addressing her father, and, in a sense, emerging—partially, tentatively—from his shadow, time collapses objects present with those “for ever lost.” An alternative final line from the fair copy of this poem reads “but backward cast / Mine eye still seeks <to find> the Future in the Past.”

To find the future in the past suggests the hand of God or fate or some innate unfolding scheme at work in objects. Yet unlike her father, Coleridge does not put her faith in symbols, which he claimed could mediate between the literal and the

metaphorical. Instead she opts for a certain literal-mindedness, and a commitment to principle as a flexible and contingent process. Writing on the “indwelling of spirit” for example, she insists that God does not dwell *in* us. She knows better than most that our bodies are neither eternal, nor are they inhabited by spirit. Further, she argues that “the soul has no direct relation to space.” She makes point, again a literal minded one, by denying that the “souls of the ancient saints” were possessed of “supernatural” sanctity. This would mean that the spirit of God was a matter of degree. For Coleridge, God either is or isn’t, but God is not a matter of degree, any more, she argues, than “being within the house or without the house is [a] matter of degree” (Coleridge Argument on the Meaning of Spiritual Indwelling). She insists upon these egalitarian principles in nearly all of her work. The limitations imposed on a person by gender, by invalidism, by circumstance of any sort cannot affect that person’s divinity. This is the principle that informs Coleridge’s extended asceticism, her parenting, her religion, and her poetics.

For Coleridge, the work of the body, the spirit, and of mourning is related yet discontinuous, fraught with interruptions, sudden stops and starts. To read through her letters and journals it to witness Coleridge exchanging her own metaphor of “foreshaping” and her mother’s characterization of her father’s “foreboding” in favor of a literal forbearance. A principle she learned through her illness, through mourning, through writing, and through her engagement with her children. That is, for Coleridge, loss is a conscious part of the experience of being with others. The loss of a child, a father, a mother, a husband, or even a way of discerning the self is

specific, yet it chimes, repeats, and reverberates with many others. A new “state”—
of affective being, of extending more fully into human life—can always be learned.

¹ It is interesting to consider in this regard S. T. Coleridge’s claims for Shakespeare, viz. that he was able to capture the universal in the particular.

² Coleridge uses the term “derangement” several times in her journal to speak about the babies’ physical ailments as well as her own. This usage is singular; in conventional usage (OED) it was reserved for mental and mechanical processes: thus, disordered machines, Sara Coleridge, *Diary of Her Children’s Early Years* Austin, TX.

³ Cf. Wordsworth’s “She was a Phantom of Delight”: “And now I see with eye serene / The very pulse of the machine.”

⁴ Cf. the rare instance of the conclusion to Part II of *Christabel*, in which S. T. Coleridge does seem to be confronted with the animal, material side of the child. More conventionally for S T C’s philosophy of the child, in “The Nightingale” he suggests an unconscious dream state as one putative cause of Hartley’s crying, rather than the materiality of tooth pain.

⁵ Of particular interest here is the issue of S. T. C.’s notebooks versus S. C. journal of her married years. The strict separation of gendered spheres demands that S. C.’s discursive activities remain within the realm of the private, domestic sphere, thus necessitating a composite discursive form—i.e. the journal of her children’s early years. That is, she must join enfold her writing in a “domestic” genre or form, however inchoate. Bodies and forms seem exchangeable terms, such that Coleridge’s own nervousness then distends or extends and helps to shape the form her writing will eventually take. Of course, Elizabeth Gaskell’s journal distends and extends the generic form of children’s journals as well, in her case in the direction of theological concerns as the same time as it foregrounds the reality of infant mortality in the nineteenth century.

⁶ See also Dorothea Olkowski, “The End of Phenomenology: Bergson’s Interval in Irigaray,” *Hypatia* 15.3 (2000).

⁷ They are also questions of canonicity, which seems especially relevant insofar as Coleridge herself has only recently received attention as a writer in her own right.

⁸ “he [Herbert] is very hungry...in a snatching way...” Coleridge, *Diary of Her Children’s Early Years*

⁹ See below for a discussion of what it means for Coleridge to include the names of her dead children, an action which takes on added significance given that Berkeley was the name of her brother, whose death immediately preceded her birth.

¹⁰ cf. Hilary Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (New York; London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). for an account of Coleridge’s “puerperal insanity,” in which Marland refers to the journal as Coleridge’s “diary.” While Marland’s account is accurate and contributes to her useful examination of the nineteenth century’s ideological conflation of “madness...menace...[and] female nature,” I want to resist reducing Coleridge’s “nervousness” and its textual traces to a medical condition.

¹¹ On “organization” see Lawrence: “Organization means the peculiar composition, which distinguishes living bodies...Thus organization, vital properties, functions, and life are expressions related to each other; in which organization is the instrument, vital properties the acting power, functioning the mode of action, and life the result (120, 21) See also Richardson 23-29.

¹² What are the connections between STC’s notebooks and SC’s journal? See Rei Terada, “Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction in Coleridge’s Notebooks,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43.2 (2004).

¹³ Milner in her essay focuses on the relation of the frame to the picture, that is, she focuses on her experience as a painter as well as a psychoanalyst. Yet she comments that the “pliable medium” for psychoanalysis is speech. I would argue that the journal becomes a frame for Coleridge and her notations are the pliable media.

¹⁴ Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic*, Arthur Henry Hallam and Thomas Hubbard Vail Motter, ““On Sympathy,”” *The Writings of Arthur Hallam* (New York, London;:

Modern language association of America; Oxford university press, 1943), James Sully, Studies of Childhood, The Emergence of Psychology (London :: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Coleridge was being advised that too much nursing could contribute to her nervous condition. She herself seems uncertain: "I have never got quite strong since my confinement. I know not whether nursing keeps me down"; cf. her mother's letter of 10/18/1832: "Our poor Sara is reduced to a very sad state of stomach & nerves by over-nursing; and her disease, which by the Medical-man is called Puerperal is of the most distressing kind" Sara Fricker Coleridge and Stephen Potter, Minnow among Tritons; Mrs. S. T. Coleridge's Letters to Thomas Poole, 1799-1834 (Bloomsbury [London]: Nonesuch press, 1934) 169, 70.

¹⁶ Kipp, Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic, Donzelot, The Policing of Families.

¹⁷ "But, if we consider both partners (mother and child) simultaneously, we can speak with Ferenczi of mutuality. This mutuality is the biological, the naïve egoism the psychological aspect. *The biological interdependence makes the naïve egoism psychologically possible*. Every disturbance of this interdependence calls forth a development beyond the naïve egoism" Michael Balint, Primary Love, and Psycho-Analytic Technique, International Psycho-Analytical Library, No. 44 (New York: Liveright Pub. Corp., 1953) 120.

¹⁸ Consider also S. T. Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn," in which a "mighty fountain momentarily burst..." and in which Kubla famously drinks "the milk of Paradise" (20, 55).

¹⁹ Marland points out that Coleridge's "daily preoccupation" with her own bowel movements results from constipation as a result of her heavy use of laudanum and opium Marland, Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain 88.

²⁰ "The excellent fluid that comes from the cow / Is better than wine for my Herbert just now; 'Tis whiter than pearls, and as soft as fine silk—/ There's both meat and drink in the nourishing drink" 43.

²¹ cf "The Boy Who Won't Lie in his Crib" in which Herbert is compared to a cow, a tiger, a sheep, an elephant, etc.

²² Edith, in fact, became her editor.

²³ cf Dorothea Olkowski, "Only Nature Is Mother to the Child," Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ed. Gail Weiss Dorothea Olkowski (University Park: Penn State Press, 2006).

²⁴ As I indicate above, this line is a thin one. Opium, insofar as it allows for a different form of reason, is fine. Her addiction to it, on other hand, what she herself terms a "battle," disallows extended asceticism because it *negates choice* and is *simply habitual* and formal.

²⁵ The Harry Ransom Center manuscript has no date on this essay, but we can presume that it dates from the 1840s in that it responds directly to a comment by Aubrey de Vere. I do not see this 5-10 year difference as a problem. Coleridge presages most of the ideas of extended asceticism in her letters to Henry—e.g. her letter from 1835 documenting Edith's punishment with the hairbrush (see below).

²⁶ It still stands to reason, that even if Coleridge's *stated* reason for discontinuing the feedings is taken at face value—"I think I have done the best for her and perhaps also for myself"—then her commitment to an extended asceticism can still be argued. In other words, she either ceases the feedings to do what is physically best for Edith or she ceases the feedings to care for herself and her children in such a way as to guarantee her sanity and ability to be there for her children in the future.

²⁷ cf. Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Early Years of my Daughter Marianne" [1835] in which the parents try a similar technique and, like Coleridge, end up crying themselves: "...we were trying to teach her [Marianne] her letters, more by way of occupation of these long winter evenings, than from any anxiety as to her progress in learning. She knew all the vowels, but refused to say A. All the others she would say, but would not once repeat A after us. We got the slate and drew it for her; but she persevered. Meta [the nanny] was asleep, so we were unwilling to provoke the violent crying, which generally ensues when she is taken upstairs; so William gave her a slap on her hand every time she refused to say it, till at last she said it quite pat. Still, I'm sure we were so unhappy that we cried, when she was gone to bed. And I don't know if it was right. If not, pray, dear Marianne, forgive us" (31, 32)...Since then we have not attempted any more lessons till she

shows some desire to resume them; and I think she is coming round, for she delights in getting a book, and saying to herself ‘This is A’ or ‘O,’ as the case may be, &c” (32).

²⁸ It is interesting to consider the ethical implications of not mourning dead children, especially in light of Judith Butler’s recent work on the global cultural work that mourning performs. Butler asks the timely question, for whom is it appropriate to mourn? Can we mourn for poor and starving people? What are we mourning when we mourn for a young girl from Sub-Saharan Africa? Does the fact that by western standards her life would have been painful, unprofitable, and anonymous suggest that her death is less worthy of being mourned?

Chapter 5

Stillborn Poetics and Tennyson's Songs

—Blessed the infant babe—
For with my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our being—blest the babe
Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,
Even in the first trial of its powers,
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detached
And loth to coalesce.

(Wordsworth's *1805 Prelude*, Book II, 233-45)

Thrice happy state again to be
The trustful infant on the knee!
Who lets his rosy fingers play
About his mother's neck, and knows
Nothing beyond his mother's eye.
They comfort him by night and day;
They light his little life away;
He hath no thought of coming woes;
He hath no care of life or death;
Scarce outward signs of joy arise,
Because the Spirit of happiness
And perfect rest so inward is.

(Tennyson's "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind" 40-52).

In the previous chapter we saw how Sara Coleridge, in order to find a right relation to her children and to corporeality more generally, needed to separate from her children, to create a space within which reverberation might happen. This chapter focuses on Alfred Tennyson's need to find a right relation to his *poems*, which, continuing the tradition of the "parturient" or pregnant poet, he conceived of as his children. In what

follows, I address two related types of spatialization in Tennyson's poetry: psychological and formal. These govern the shape of my chapter, in that my first section is devoted to psychological distancing, what I term Tennyson's stillborn poetics. The second section develops a formal reading of ballad or song and its connection to infancy, again, conceived of as a space of poetic origination.

Tennyson and Wordsworth

As we have seen, for English poetry, anxiety over "losing the child" (childhood, innocence, grace, nature, etc.) is a perennial, malleable, and seemingly inexhaustible theme. For a poet, distancing oneself from the child has potentially damaging consequences insofar as childhood—remembered or imagined—is regarded as a privileged space of experience. I argued in chapter 1 that Wordsworth's Ode presents "immortality" and infancy so as to allow a spatial rather than temporal relation to the individual and / or collective past, and by extension, an access to poetic origination. This access allows a feeling of immediacy at the level of the individual philosophical subject at the same time as it authorizes a connection to an ongoing poetic tradition for the poet. Yet representations of infancy in 19th-c poetry were, and are still more often read as sealed off and inaccessible to the adult poet or reader, either nostalgically yearned for, or relinquished for the subtler pleasures of the "philosophic mind"—processes that correspond respectively to melancholia and mourning.

The two passages that serve as epigraphs for this chapter, separated by twenty five years, for all their thematic similarity, markedly reflect precisely these dissimilar processes and beliefs. They also reproduce in miniature many of my larger concerns in this chapter. The infant-mother pairing is paradigmatic in each (note not only the

verbatim allusion [“his mother’s eye”] but also its verbatim placement in the verse); but whereas in Wordsworth, the love of the mother makes possible a movement from human connectedness to the nurturance of a nature that “never did betray the heart that loved her,” for Tennyson, absent the active *feeling* of God (“Why pray / To one who heeds not, who can save / But will not?” [88-90]), separation from the mother results simply in alienation and dejection.

¹ What was, for example, in Wordsworth’s Ode the idealized and *personal* loss of the “glory and the dream,” gets reworked in Tennyson’s *The Princess* as a *social* anxiety over the “loss of the child.”² This opposition seems inexplicable on the surface insofar as one would expect Wordsworth’s compensatory “developmental” narrative to be characterized as a more realistic position, whereas Tennyson’s desire to be ensconced in an infantile relation with the mother as the more idealistic wish. But the oppositions of idealism and realism reverse if you consider that Tennyson’s narrator does not lose his faith in the immediacy of *infancy* but rather loses his belief in the compensatory succor of the philosophic mind—that is, in the social and cultural realms in which “Scarce outward signs of joy arise.” Here Tennyson, by not evincing faith in the developmental stages of the soul, places himself philosophically at odds with the Arnoldian-Hegelian concept of historical dialecticism. As I will argue, the social for Tennyson is not only threatening for its “corpse-like”³ valorization of free-will over and against any affective knowledge of immortality or faith, but the social always also represents a threatening usurpation of poetic expression, insofar as publication and circulation leave the poet open for critique on all sides. Of course, Tennyson characteristically distances himself from

these valuations of the social by presenting “Supposed Confessions...” as a dramatic monologue.

Yet whether we ascribe these doubts to Tennyson or to some other “second-rate” mind, the seemingly irrecoverable loss of the child remains a constant theme for Tennyson, a personal, professional, and social problem that refuses to be compensated for by insertion into the dialectical mechanisms of 19th-c narratives of development or *bildung*. The original title for Tennyson’s poem, as published in 1830, was “Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind *Not in Unity with Itself*” (italics added). Tennyson’s interest in formal and psychological heterogeneity, what contemporaneous critics referred to as his “grotesque” aesthetic, suggests an ambivalence about the possibility, if not the very value, of unity, expressed in the discourses of moral and political philosophy as “individualism” or autonomy, and referenced in the language of poetic theory and aesthetics as “harmony” or “organic form.”

This chapter traces the trajectory of Tennyson’s skeptical poetics of disunity, and suggests that Tennyson’s anxiety over the loss of the child, particularly as expressed in *The Princess*, Tennyson’s first long poem, and one of his most problematic, can be productively read as arising from a complex of literary-historical, psychic, personal and professional determinations.⁴ Whereas Wordsworth, my starting point in this study, can express faith in the combinatory power of poetic feeling in the mind, which “combine /In one appearance all the elements / And parts of the same object,” Tennyson’s poems deal primarily with dispersion. Parts do not necessarily cohere.

The desire for coherence—professional, aesthetic, and psychological—is evinced in Tennyson’s desire in the 1840s and 50s to produce longer poems, which resulted in a series of strange hybrid forms, from the pseudo or psychological “medley” (*The Princess*) to the elegiac poem of eternal return (*In Memoriam*). Contained within these longer poems are shorter, “received” forms, which in turn led critics to ponder the use of these forms as indexical of the relative moral, poetic, and political health of the culture that produced them. Tennyson himself claimed that the key to understanding the longer *The Princess* was to focus on the child as presented in the interpolated songs.

One argument of this chapter is that Tennyson’s apprehension of social and cultural anxiety concerning the “loss of the child” (innocence, belief, poetic originality) is continuous with his search for a more flexible poetic form. Consider, for example that many of the songs that were added to *The Princess* in the second edition of the poem are primarily balladic. This matters because, as I will argue, ballad measure and the child were thought to be (arguably may *still* be thought to be) determinately and reciprocally linked.⁵ The linkage between ballad and the child was part of a discourse that was available and would have been known to Tennyson, although it functioned under many names: nature, evolution, organic form, the romantic, the classical/mythical past, the history of prosody, etc. The critical connection has been extensively made for us by many scholars of nineteenth-century literature. For example, U. C. Knoepflmacher shows the reception of “nature” and “childhood” by Victorian era writers, focusing especially on the cult of Wordsworthianism (Knoepflmacher and Tennyson). William Empson focuses on the

relation between the figure of the child and the mythical past, specifically arguing that it displaced the swain or shepherd as the prominent trope of poetic origin (Empson). One of the earliest and most influential documents to link the poet and the history of poetry to the child is Friedrich Schiller's essay *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (Schiller *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry, and on the Sublime; Two Essays*). Nietzsche famously rereads Schiller, focusing on the role of the shepherd and the child-like qualities of the poet as they relate to the classical past (Nietzsche and Smith 42-58).

Wordsworth figures here as well, first, as one of the authors of *The Lyrical Ballads* (a work that put childhood and ballad front and center), and secondly, as the outgoing poet laureate, whose shadow Tennyson, the incoming poet laureate, struggled to step out of. Emblematic of this struggle is the anecdote of Tennyson writing "Tears, Idle Tears," the most well-known of the songs from *The Princess*, at Tintern Abbey, yet only a short distance from Hallam's grave.⁶ Tennyson is thus literally writing his poem and his poetic legacy fixed between these two monuments of influence, the site of Wordsworth's great poem and the resting place of Arthur Hallam. Furthermore, Wordsworth's own death, not to mention the posthumous publication of *The Prelude*—perhaps the most sustained paean ever written to the poetic powers of the child—was more or less contemporaneous with the publication and revision of *The Princess*.⁷ My argument here is not about the anxiety of influence per se, rather I'm interested in tracking the historical refiguration of a specific trope—namely that of the parturient or pregnant poet—while also marking the related reception, use, and revision of ballad measure.⁸ In teasing out this connection, I will argue that Tennyson uses ballad measure or song to intercut and

organize the longer structures in the poem, incorporating and revising the poetic materials of the past, all of which allows him simultaneously to manage the psychological and poetic pressures of personal and professional loss.⁹

Section I deals explicitly with Tennyson's anxiety, what I term, building on theories of poetic origination, an *anxiety of circulation*. I read this anxiety as being a constant force in Tennyson's poetics, one in which the figure of the parturient or pregnant poet comes to play an important part. Since Diotima's colloquy on love in Plato's *Symposium*, the parturient poet has served as a metaphor for the solitary, self-authorizing creator. Specifically, as Tennyson deploys it, the figure serves to mediate between the realms of the personal and the poetic, the professional and the domestic. As we will see, for Tennyson, parturient poetics is untenable as a practice, at least in the age of the mass production and circulation of poetry. On one level, he feels his poems as children. The question becomes then whether to subject them to the whims of constantly changing literary opinion, thereby subjecting a part of himself to critique, or whether to wall himself off from his critics, his readership. Yet to steel himself would be to repress his sensitivity, the very quality (Tennyson calls it being "half-woman natured") that makes him a "true-cast" poet in the first place. Drawing on bits of poems and letters addressing the stillbirth of his first son, I argue that a poetics of distancing, that is, a refiguration that allows for the recognition that poems are separate from the self, allows Tennyson to gradually let go of his poems and the need to control their reception. This distancing amounts to the insertion of a spatial and temporal interval.¹⁰ I call this a stillborn poetics.

I also comment on some of the effects of Tennyson's adaptation of a feminine posture of receptivity and protectiveness over and against the pressures of a masculine market of poetic reception and production. My analysis of these related phenomena (the economies of psychology and form, theories of unpleasure and pleasure, and the role of gender in nineteenth-century cultural production) relies on certain psychoanalytic terms and concepts. One lesser known concept, and one developed further by those around Freud than by Freud himself, is the concept of birth trauma. Birth trauma, a theory that recurs in different forms throughout the history of psychoanalysis, helps to shed new light on the oft-cited problem of Tennyson's reticence, which I refer to here more specifically as his anxiety about producing and reproducing his poetry.¹¹

Specifically, I'm interested in thinking about Tennyson's anxiety using theoretical models of subjectivity and poetic production that are *non-repressive*. Any reader of Tennyson knows that instances of birth and infant death provide him fertile, yet anxious, poetic ground. Yet where most accounts of Tennyson read anxiety as corresponding to some previous loss or losses, birth trauma suggests that anxiety is part of what constitutes us as human animals, and thus is not repressive, that is, is not caught up in a constant cycle of sublimation. In part, I use a scaffolding of arguments made by Stephan Gill and others about Tennyson's skepticism or melancholy versus Wordsworth's faith or normative mourning in order to construct an argument that is not so much about what *kinds* of losses might be gathered up in Tennyson's anxiety over the "loss of the child"; but rather puts anxiety itself—as a material fact of our existence—at the center of Tennyson's poetics.¹²

In section II, I look specifically of Tennyson's use of ballad or English measure. If we take birth trauma as synonymous with Tennyson's reluctance to circulate his poems, then ballad measure in some ways represents the working through of that resistance, providing us with a revised picture of the "economic" relation between received poetic forms and psychological and cultural pressures. The ethical implications of a desire to return—to the infancy of English poetry (which ballad represented) as well as to the poet's remembered or represented past—need not necessarily be read as regressive or anti-social.

Tennyson's critique of formal and psychological unity, when understood as part of a larger concern over the loss of the child, suggests that a wish to return to infant states need not be merely a desire for stasis; it may also be a wish to be unified with someone or something else, that is, to be in relation. In a similar sense, Tennyson's poetry suggests, through its use of received forms such as ballad, a critique of idealized theories of organic form or compositional unity. A poem or a mind in *unity with itself* is necessarily sealed off from other minds, bodies, and poems.¹³

Part 1:
"Children of my Silence"

In April of 1851, on Easter Sunday, Alfred Tennyson's first child was still-born. The child, a boy, was apparently strangled by the umbilical cord. Christopher Ricks reports that the poet never forgot this "great grief" (Ricks 221). Rather than send a death notice to the newspaper, Tennyson took it upon himself to "write some 60 letters" to inform friends and family of the news. What follows is representative:

My dear Robert,

I am quite sure you will feel with me. My poor little boy got strangled in being born...I have suffered more than ever I thought I could have done for a child still born...he was the grandest-looking child I have ever seen. Pardon my saying this. I do not speak only as a father but as an Artist...he looked...majestic in his mysterious silence...(II: 15)

Those accustomed to the poet's guarded epistolary style may be surprised to read such a direct and open expression of grief: "I have suffered more than ever I thought I could have done..." Tennyson speaks as an artist *and* a father perhaps in order to justify the intensity of his attachment to the child, but his claim also suggests an inchoate aesthetic judgment, itself in the process of being born. According to this aesthetic, what determines the beauty of the still-born child is his silence. Neither action nor character determines the child's greatness; rather, it is his unrealizable or arrested potential. And precisely to the degree that Tennyson is surprised by the force of his grief, must he at once express it and sublimate it; that is, he must write in such a way as to reproduce the intimate effects of surprise and speech. He must fill up the "mysterious silence" attributable to the child—a child, more *and* less than *infans*, not only incapable of speech, but also incapable of sound. In other words, the incapacity for speech in the perceived compels the percipient to speak in its place.

This feeling of compulsion at once results from and precipitates an intense identification. I say that identification is both cause *and* effect of a compulsion to speak in order to foreground the ways in which the poetic description of a stillborn infant tends necessarily toward prosopopoeia. Any attempt to grant potential or futurity to the stillborn child breaks down the binaries of living-dead, speaking-silent, and subject-object. For example, the two participles initially describing the child and the father—"strangled" and "suffered"—are almost interchangeable and occupy more

or less identical places in their respective sentences. Additional mirrorings and reversals, implicit and explicit, occur through the passage. The roles of the father (pater, creator, “majestic” sovereign) are hived off and given to the son, whereas the conventional positions of the son (admiration, identification, supplication) are assumed instead by the father. Even the fixed roles of the percipient / perceived dyad are tenuous, liable to subtle shifts. Thus, the “grandest-*looking* child” seems capable of looking back at his father – he “looked...” This confusion—this fusing *with*—reproduces the mutability of object boundaries ascribed both to the state of infancy in nineteenth-century philosophy and natural science, as well as to the poet of immediate experience in aesthetic theories of the period.¹⁴

This confusion of roles and states need not merely be read in the context of Tennyson the father, but may also understood as an integral aspect of a certain period of Tennyson’s poetic career, specifically, the ten years separating the publication of *Poems* (1842) and the stillbirth of his son. By all accounts, these were turbulent years for Tennyson, shot through with anxieties about his abilities as a poet and his ambivalent relationship to his own reading audience (Ricks). The stillbirth of his son is not an epiphanic event as I see it; rather it represents a continuing process of holding onto and releasing poems, people, memories, and personal and professional identifications. Similarly, what I will term a stillborn poetics is not a transcendent or static aesthetic either. In some ways it precedes the actual stillbirth and continues to inform Tennyson’s poetic practice throughout his long career. As I have already stated, the fact of Tennyson’s parturient poetics (that is, his tendency to think of, and *treat* his poems as children) is not unique per se. What stillbirth—as a trope, a

thematic, and an emblem—reveals are unique pathways, or perhaps sightlines, to viewing and understanding the problem of authorial anxiety, refigured now not so much as an anxiety about origins, so much as an anxiety about circulation.

As the letter quoted above indicates, this relation between author and text, stillborn child and poet, gets collapsed. Tennyson maintains these slippages and reversals as well as this emotional pitch (a strained and strangely objective subjectivity) in nearly all the extant letters, repeating several times how beautiful the child was, how he kissed his “poor, pale hands,” expressing his open embarrassment at being so moved: “I am foolish [i.e. childish] enough to be affected with all this.”¹⁵

An unfinished fragment of poetry survives:

Little bosom not yet cold,
Noble forehead made for thought,
Little hands of mighty mould
Clenched as in the fight which they had fought.
He had done battle to be born,
But some brute force of Nature had prevailed
And the little warrior failed.
Whate'er thou wert, whate'er thou art,
Whose life was ended ere thy breath begun,
Thou nine-months neighbor of my dear one's heart,
And howsoe'er thou liest blind and mute
Thou lookest bold and resolute,
God bless thee dearest son.

Here again expression and observation are mixed; a strange amalgam of coldness and passion imbues the blazon. The poem, unlike any of the letters, employs the masculine rhetoric of war.¹⁶ We can interpret this difference as either a defense against (public) feeling or as an example of the increasing segregation of genres by gender—the openness of the (feminine) epistolary form versus the steely defensiveness of (masculine) lyric.¹⁷ Either way, there is neither violence nor anger

in the descriptions or the tone. Rather, there is acceptance, and a desire to sing the praises of an ineffable masculine beauty. It is significant for Tennyson, as he reports in one letter, that the child never took a breath (“not born—I cannot call it born for he never breathed”).¹⁸

The apostrophe that signals the turn in the lyric (“Whate’er thou wert...”) is not merely a turn or a swerve, for, it also marks a desperate attempt at animation. Theorists of poetic voice and address have suggested that apostrophe signals an effort to animate dead or missing objects in order that they might, in response, “constitute an image of the self.”¹⁹ But Tennyson’s apostrophe is triggered by a “fail[ure]” in the preceding line that seems at once the still-born child’s, the poet’s, and, in an overarching sense, humankind’s. In other words, the signature emotions of the poem, tenderness and intimacy, are *only possible if the possibility of animating breath is denied*.²⁰ He may speak as a father about a living child in other words, but were he to speak as a father and an artist about his living infant (think of S. T. Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” for example) there is always the problem of projection; the prophetic claims of the poem and the real life of the child can diverge at any point. But with a stillborn child, some quality or qualities (you could almost say life itself) remain preserved in the child, locked up forever within, protected.

Of course it is common in the criticism to recognize within Tennyson’s thought and poetics a quality that identifies with and longs for the stillness of death. Yet whereas other critics have been quick to seize on Tennyson’s “fixations” (Rowlinson) or his ambivalent submission to doom (Tucker), I am interested in connecting those drives or tendencies to his poetics as well as to his deeply

ambivalent feelings about having his poems circulate or reverberate, that is, having them subject to constant critique. As we will see, the nexus of public and private realms, roles, and spaces is precisely where stillbirth emerges as a figure for Tennyson's poetics. Writing necessitates crossing a space between the domestic and public spheres. The language of one discourse or level gets appropriated by the other. Thus, Tennyson can claim to speak as a father *and* an artist. Similarly, in 1833, Tennyson can write in a letter to James Spedding, "...I was delivered of them [letters] so long after conception—my confinement was very painful—the nurses said it was like to have proved a still birth" (Tennyson, Lang and Shannon Vol. 1, 86).

Language reverberates between and through discursive realms or spheres, producing a superposition of roles and states in these texts. Tennyson's inability to keep poems, names, and persons within their proper boundaries is continuous with the tendency for the rhetoric of infancy to reverberate wildly, producing a *feedback* effect that is not without possibilities (poetic and otherwise). It is this overlay of categories (father on son; feminine on masculine; life on death; public on private; artist on creation) that forms the basic problem the chapter addresses, namely, how the poet—figured, as we shall see, maternally—can find the requisite emotional and psychic distance from his poems, or, as he refers to them, his children.

Stillborn poetics offers new possibilities for creating a space of autonomy for poets overly identified with their creative productions. It also allows us to rethink aesthetic production and reproduction in terms that are not necessarily Oedipal.²¹ Conventionally, theories of poetic origination have conventionally been thought of in Oedipal or anti-Oedipal terms. By extending the series anxiety of influence to

anxiety of authorship, we arrive finally at anxiety of *intrusion* (Green 14) or *circulation*.²² In terms of a reverberative poetics, fear of intrusion is the effect of a feedback loop, in which it becomes difficult necessary to write in order to guarantee your individual existence. And while it is a commonplace to speak of Tennyson's nervousness or anxiety, issues of circulation only become visible and available for critique when the developing discourses of family, infancy, privacy, and the child are read against the discourse of poetic production and reproduction. Another way to frame my difference from previous critics is to say that whereas they are interested in repression, I am interested in models of production and reproduction that are prior to or outside of the repressive hypothesis altogether—a move away from oedipal guilt toward the letting go and finding of objects, that is, toward reverberation.²³ And when this language and these figures are used to describe literary production, we are presented with a new way of understanding the relation between the discourse of poetic originality and larger societal and cultural discourses such as gender and domesticity.

Circulation, Reverberation, and Birth Trauma

It is not only that Tennyson aestheticizes stillbirth. He also articulates a desire for a poetry that does not circulate, in other words, for a stillborn poetics. Tennyson wrote the following fragment a full twelve years before the letter quoted from above. It was published in *The London Times* thirty years after its composition (I quote only the first several lines). The poem attests to the potency of Tennyson's self image as a solitary creator, his anxiety concerning the social realm more generally, and the

affective force with which he felt the threat of usurpation, or intrusion, from voices and valuations sounded from within and without.

Wherefore, in these dark ages of the Press
(As that old Teuton christened them) should I,
Sane mind and body, wish to print my rhyme,
Fame's millionth heir-apparent? why desire
(If like a man that hath his sense compact
I write a clean fair hand) the public thumb
Of our good pamphlet-pampered age to fret
And sweat upon mine honest thoughts in type,
The children of my silence? I today
Lord of myself and of my ways, the next
A popular property, nauseate, when my name
Shot like a racketball from mouth to mouth
And bandies in the barren lips of fools
May yield my feeling organism pain
Thrice keener than delight from duest praise?
And if I be, as truecast Poets are,
Half woman-natured, typing all mankind;
So must I triple-man myself and case
My humours as the caddisworm in stone,
Or doing violence to my modest worth
With one long-lasting hope chain-cable-strong
Self-fixt, immoor in patience, till I die...(Ricks 48, 9)

Several dangers appear in the poem, to the poet as well as to his poems. First, there is the threatening technology of print itself, as though in the dark ages of the press, “type” yields more easily to fretting judgment, to the meanness of the “public thumb,” than does, say, ink and pen on paper. The poet’s “clean fair hand” is at once the product and evidence of his “sane mind and body.” Typing and typology blend in homonymic repetition; to represent is to reproduce, to reduce “honest thoughts” to mere manufacture.²⁴

The psychic territory “Wherefore in these dark ages...” is the blurred boundary between inside and outside, public and private. Thus, sensitivity to having one’s “self”—name, poem, thought—swallowed results in images of nausea and

being vomited, “shot...from mouth to mouth.”²⁵ These images of orality and depth refuse the space and surface required for reverberation.²⁶ The sensitive skin of the poet (“thrice as keen to insult as to praise”) is akin to the porosity and thinness of paper. Importantly, there seems little difference between the poet and his productions at all. Tennyson projects onto his readership signs of authorial labor that suggest yet another permeable boundary, this time between poet and audience; the public “frets” and “sweats” over the poet’s thoughts, his children. Sweating and fretting (the rhyme reinforces their relatedness) should be the actions of the poet-parent. It is almost as if the bearing forth, the sweating and fretting—the *labor* necessary to bring forth a child or a poem—is itself the problem, at least insofar as these bodily processes are cast as dangerous and then projected onto readers.²⁷ Any transmission of the poem (spoken or pamphleted), as the etymology of “transmission” suggests, results in the crossing of a threshold or border.

In the need to seal himself off from the barren fools (the critics), Tennyson potentially seals himself off *from*, and, at the same time, identifies himself *with*, the opposite sex; true-cast poets are half-woman natured.²⁸ His immediate defense against this admission is telling. If he, as a poet, is half-woman, he will “triple-man” himself in response. Tennyson originally adopted a more distanced position vis-à-vis his half woman nature: an earlier manuscript version (MS A as compared to the Trinity Notebook) is written from a third person perspective: “...should any man desire to print his rhyme” rather than “should I...wish to print my rhyme.” Why Tennyson chose to collapse the distance—from “he” to “me”—is unclear. The effect though is of a heightened, more immediate danger and response.²⁹

Reframing the problem in the language of my larger argument, the reverberations (literary historical, biographical, psychological, etc.) are so loud and frequent in this poem that agency, producer and product, cause and effect are merged. This creates a feedback loop. Trapped in a narcissistic identification—by which I mean simply that the children of the poet’s thoughts *are* his thoughts, the product *is* the producer: thus, an attack on the poem is an attack on the thought, which, in turn, is an attack on the self (now made coequal with the poet’s name)—and is unable to conceive of the poem as difference, as having autonomous life outside the self, all of which results in a stunted birth.

In fact, the twelve years or so that separate “Wherefore” and his son’s stillbirth find Tennyson employing several different strategies for coping with the anxiety of circulation— anonymity, intense revision of *The Princess* (including, as we will see, the interpolation of several songs that were primarily about the loss of the child), corresponding directly with critics about their reviews of his work, and the delayed and (initially) pseudonymous publication of *In Memoriam*. In other words, what I have termed a stillborn poetics is part of a dynamic ongoing process. Tennyson’s intense identification with his poems, as well as his increasing celebrity, requires that he manage his public as well as private persona. Therefore, it is central to my argument that what holds for Tennyson’s poetics holds in the realm of subject development (in this case the development of a poetic subject) as well. Looking back then to “Wherefore...”, we can see that by resisting the recognition, and possible misrecognition, of the reader/critic, Tennyson also resists the recognition of the necessary other, through which the poem *and* poet might mark their entrance into the

symbolic order, that is, into the literary marketplace.³⁰ Instead, Tennyson's intense identification of poem and name as well as the identification of publication and death—"immoor in patience, till I die"—suggests that to enter into public life, into circulation, constitutes not only a private death, but also the death of the private realm altogether, where the private realm is conceived of, as it consistently is in Tennyson's poems, as the safety and unified bond of the enmeshed mother and child.³¹

Thus, it becomes clear that the dream of a poetry that communicates without the mediation of the critic's or reader's possible misconstrual is a translation of Tennyson's idealistic and fragile representation of infancy into a theory of authorship that retreats from, at the same time as it entreats, the reader. The fear of intrusion coupled with Tennyson's construction of a parturient poet suggests a defensive retreat from or avoidance of an overdetermined loss or absence. In part, I am recognizing what many critics have noticed, that is, that Tennyson's surplus of dread corresponds, but is irreducible to, an earlier loss or losses.³² But what I am adding to that critical construction is the further recognition that the insistent figure of the lost or still-born child is entangled with that loss. Tennyson's anxiety about having his poems, his children, subjected to a critical readership recasts theories of his melancholy in such a way as to show that his anxiety also belongs to the discourse of poetic authorship and origination. From this vantage point, it becomes apparent that although Tennyson's anxiety is encoded, at the formal level, in the symbolic realm of sexuality (poet as mother), and is represented, at the level of "message," in the thematic realm of gender (half-woman natured), it is also a loss articulated within a literary tradition and history, and within existing debates about poetic form and the "place of the poet."

This final point is particularly significant since the stillbirth of his son more or less corresponds to his assumption of his poet-laureateship as well as to the death of Wordsworth, the out-going poet laureate.

I suggest that given Tennyson's tendency to figure children as particularly vulnerable to the excesses or deficits in society and culture, his identification of children with his poems takes on added significance. In many of Tennyson's poems (*The Princess*, *Maud*, "Demeter and Persephone"), children—symbolic of that which needs protection in aesthetics *and* in culture (poetry being most often construed as the "purest," and therefore most vulnerable, art)—are presumed to be in danger. "Wherefore in these Dark Ages," by locating poems as being half-in and half-out of the poet, revises the dilemma from one of exterior forces that exercise their wills on ideas (i.e. discursively) to an anxiety about intrusion at the level of the body, which therefore rephrases the problem as one that is formal (i.e. pre- or extra-lingual) as well as discursive. As we have seen, the poem itself is fraught with posterior caesuras and multiple enjambments, especially in those sections in which Tennyson considers the impact or impingement of a public readership on his creative output: "why desire...I today...the next...till I die..." These fragmentary lines reproduce the brokenness and conflicted quality of thought, the fragility and vulnerability of a poet working very hard to be understood, when the message of the poem is that such understanding is probably not going to occur.³³

By reading Tennyson's idealization and aesthetization of his stillborn son in conjunction with his construction of what I have been calling a parturient poetics we gain a deeper understanding of both moments. Both texts consistently valorize

poems, names, and persons that do not or cannot circulate, and which therefore do not reverberate. Yet the paranoia of “Wherefore in these Dark Ages” is virtually absent in “Little Bosom not yet cold.” While each poem describes a sometimes painful confusion—what I refer to above, echoing Derrida, as a superpositioning—“Little Bosom not yet cold” signals a move from enclosure, encryptedness, and enmeshment to identification, acceptance, and mourning. It is between these shifting *positions* that the figure of the stillborn child emerges as an emblem for a poetry that can occupy a middle position between the poet and the world, between circulation and the safety of silence.³⁴

To reiterate and reframe the extreme poles of the two texts we been discussing,³⁵ let us say that life—pleasure, Eros, what Tennyson terms “delight from duest praise”—corresponds to the circulation of poems. This circulation is not without its dangers—to the “feeling organism” as well as to the “name,” that is, to one’s lineage (poetic and otherwise). Not to circulate poems is potentially to do damage to one’s “modest worth.” It is important to note that Tennyson’s choice is not between making poems and not making them. It is rather a question of, of public versus private realms.³⁶ To preserve his worth he must risk his name. He must risk completing the circuit poet/poem/reader. Only then will his name be preserved. The sex instincts, says Freud, are conservative insofar as they allow us to “preserve life itself for a comparatively long period.”³⁷ Thus, Freud connects the sexual instincts to the “Eros of the poets and philosophers which binds all living things together.”³⁸ This binding—a feature of address (apostrophe) in poetry and a feature of cathexis in psychoanalytic discourse (identification or projection)—requires movement, mobility,

a degree of letting go. Tennyson realizes this. He well recognizes that to withhold his poems from the public, to fail to reproduce his name, would do “violence to his modest worth.”

The more radical instinct however, and the one that is harder for all of us (Freud included) to accept, is the death instinct.³⁹ What makes the death instinct so counter-intuitive is that it does not operate according to typical models of repression. It is strictly formal and does not respond to or result in latent content. Instead, the death instinct as Freud conceives it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, responds to a universal material fact. The very *fact of being born* sets up a separation for us, which results in a consequent anxiety.

Anxiety is not newly created in repression; it is reproduced as an affective state in accordance with an already existing mnemonic image...In man and the higher animals it would seem that *the act of birth, as the individual's first experience of anxiety*, has given the affect of anxiety certain characteristic forms of expression. (my emphasis)

This initial anxiety stems from a material and literal separation, one that precedes Lacan's entrance into the symbolic order.⁴⁰ When the concept of birth trauma is reinserted into the critical oppositions of Eros/Thanos, then it becomes clearer to see how still-birth and poetic parturience function in these texts.⁴¹ If, as Freud argues, birth trauma partially motivates the death drive (that is, the move toward stasis and non-circulation), then it may well serve as a *non-repressive* figure for Tennyson's “nervousness” or paranoid authorial position.⁴² The emblem of his still-born son responds directly to the particular effects (fear of circulation) of a universal trauma (the double anxiety of being “social” and separate), in fact, that it works to reverse these effects. It does so by providing an alternate image to that mnemonic or bodily

image,⁴³ by introducing something outside the self that might act as buffer between the poet and his critics—an *unfeeling* organism.

In “Wherefore in these dark ages,” the poet figure receives critique, *feels* it, at the level of the body—hands, humours, mouths, and nauseous stomachs. By recognizing and responding to the figure of the stillborn child, importantly a *bodily* image (remember, it precedes and exceeds language), in between life and death, circulation and encirclement, the natural and the social, Tennyson slows or quiets the reverberation, the endless feedback loop. He finds a *relation* to his own poems—a position and a workable poetic practice.

Part 2: Song as Stillborn Form

There is ample evidence that Tennyson first conceived the idea for *The Princess* in the same year that “Wherefore in these Dark Ages” was written.⁴⁴ And while *The Princess* evolved significantly over time, clearly the impetus to conceive of a longer, multi-vocal poem arose, at least in part, in response to the pressures articulated in “Wherefore...” In any case, the composition of *The Princess* was certainly not one of immediate inspiration. In fact, it is part of the lore of Tennyson’s *The Princess* that it underwent significant revisions in the course of its first three publications.⁴⁵ In fact, the early publication history and reception seem as interesting to critics as the text(s) of the poem itself. Several songs (centering primarily on the figure of the child) were included in the third addition, inserted between the seven narrative sections of the larger mock-heroic poem. As Tennyson recounts, “The child is the link through the parts, as shown in the Songs, which are the best interpreters of the poem” (Ricks

741). The collegiate narrator of the poem announces in the prologue, that unlike the heroic narrative (told in seven parts by the seven college friends), “the ladies [will] sing...some ballad or a song / To give us breathing-space” (233-35). Commentators have, from the earliest reviews to the present, almost universally preferred the “breathing space” of the lyric sections or songs to the narrative “rougher”⁴⁶ body of the poem. Song then becomes not only the sole province of the feminine, but the poem’s most universally satisfying aesthetic element.⁴⁷

In all of its versions, *The Princess* has been read as an attempt to educate, improve the conditions of, chasten, and / or subdue women. So perhaps it is not surprising to find that song, the realm that Tennyson ascribes to women, also was historically privileged in the nineteenth-century as the mode best suited to communicate *affective*, i.e. sentimental or domestic, truths.⁴⁸ As I argue above, the gendering of poetic form takes on unique significance for Tennyson, especially given his assertion that all true-cast poets are “half woman-natured. According to George Saintsbury in his discussion of *The Princess* in *The History of English Prosody* (1923), song accomplishes these ends not merely by means of its content, but also by its more malleable, fluid, and dexterous form. While Saintsbury expresses admiration for Tennyson’s plurality of styles, he notes specifically the taste for shorter pieces, claiming that it was the “bent of the century.” Shorter pieces gave themselves to “more opportunities for varying prosodic success than the long,” and, as a consequence, the “addition of [Tennyson’s] songs...was a rich prosodic as well as poetic *bonus*”(v. III 202, 03),

According to the 19th-century critical consensus, it is not simply that the songs compensate for an aesthetic gap in the blank verse (Tennyson is generally acknowledged to be a masterful practitioner of blank verse),⁴⁹ nor that they merely communicate corrective meanings; rather, the “bonus” (the “good”)⁵⁰ provided by the songs is woven into the texture of the poem, serving now pedagogic, now disciplinary, and now aesthetic ends: “The songs themselves...stand then not merely for the sake of their intrinsic beauty, but to call the reader’s mind, at every pause in the tale of the Princess’s folly, to that very healthy ideal of womanhood which she has spurned”(Tennyson and Chalmers 12, 13). Yet it is not at all clear—from Tennyson’s own comments that is—precisely what was to be called to the reader’s mind by the songs. With a characteristic mix of scrupulousness and opacity, Tennyson writes to S. E. Dawson, corroborating that the child was indeed the “heroine of the piece” and that the songs were intended to clarify what “the public did not see” (Tennyson and Chalmers 18). 20th and 21st-century critics have generally agreed that the songs manage to muddy the message of the poem at least as much as they clarify it. Even Jerome Buckley, one of Tennyson’s most perceptive and eminent twentieth-century critics, sees no direct correlation between the songs and the larger theme of the poem: “If they do indeed interpret the action, they must indicate a real theme beyond the apparent occasion of the poem, a meaning apart from all contemporary sympathies.”(100) Recently, critics, responding largely to the most influential late-twentieth-century readings of the poem by Eve Sedgwick and Terry Eagleton, have interpreted the songs as operating at odds with the mock-heroic elements: pointing to “the extent of Tennyson’s feminist sympathies” (Clapp-Itnyre 229); or, working in

tandem with the framing narratives to repress “any advance toward polyphony”(Herbert 149).

Yet if the child *is* the link through the parts and the songs *are* the key to the poem, what determines the connection between the figure of the child and the form of the song? One partial answer is that they both operate as spatial interruptions.⁵¹ The generic space carved out by the songs allows them to enter into subtle contestation with the narrative or blank verse elements in the poem. On this level, the song’s resistance to being integrated into the narrative acts as an interruption. Ballad measure uniquely underscores this interruption, especially insofar as ballad might be thought of as an archaic point of contact with an earlier poetics, thus helping to explain not only the predominance of ballad within the songs, but also the relation between a specific received form (with all of its ideological connotations) and stillborn poetics. Tennyson’s ongoing engagement with the genre of ballad thus takes on added meaning. The earliest songs in *The Princess* are ballads; then as the story progresses, the songs shift toward a pentameter line.

Of course, song/ballad as a genre carries its own internal relation to the child, its own connotative and connective resonances (of which the child is only one: ballad is also associated with the “masses,” a feminine readership, and an earlier, less fragmented sense of national identity, primarily identified [positively] with Wordsworth, and [radically or prophetically] with Blake).⁵² These connections were so ingrained in nineteenth-century culture that to include, as Tennyson proposed to do in *The Princess*, a ballad entitled “The Losing of the Child” is tantamount to worrying the loss of an object in a form whose very articulation constitutes its resuscitation.

What emerges from this understanding of song is a form that is simultaneously disruptive *and* elegiac, conservative *and* subversive.

From Fits of Passion to Breathing Space

Within the narrative arc of the poem, the Prince's "weird seizures" are also relevant insofar as they point to the femininity and even maternal nature of the Prince/narrator. The seizures give way (birth) to the interpolated ballad sections of the poem, suggesting that sensitivity and sensibility are still poetic prerequisites in Tennyson's schema. The figure of the parturient poet therefore can be situated within in a literary-historical genealogy of lyric's engagement with the figure of child and ballad form. What I have termed above poetic parturition matters here in a formal way. In other words, Tennyson's anxiety about poetic reproduction and reception, an anxiety doubled symptomatically as the Prince's "weird seizures," necessitates a formal gesture, namely, the inclusion of the songs.

The seizures were added by Tennyson after the songs. They constitute in fact his final revisions. And, in some measure, they act as an index of the Prince's anxiety, an anxiety that paradoxically gets worked out through incorporation of the songs. Celeste Langan and Andrew Elfenbein have written about this relation between a kind of "nerve-language" and the production of poetic verse (63).⁵³ A kind of corollary or vestige of the space of the infant, the boundary between sleep and consciousness gets conceived by nineteenth-century critics as a site of lyric generation and effect (song "awakes all the fountains of bitter-sweet memory, sets us dreaming like a half audible strain of music in the distance, without fixing the mind to definite objects, suspends reflection and will..."). These dream states, like

metaphysical experience more generally, are part and parcel of the self-conception of many nineteenth-century poets. Keats is the paradigmatic example. For Tennyson the danger occurs when the poet's dream language, the children of his silence, comes in contact with systems of exchange, publication, circulation, etc. Likewise for the Prince in the poem, liminal spaces are locations of potentially dangerous confrontations:

And then to bed, where half in doze I seem'd
To float about a glimmering night, and watch
A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight, swell
On some dark shore just seen that it was rich. I: 242-5

In is in this state of in between that song first breaks into the poem. As I have suggested, the Prince's seizures uniformly anticipate most of the interpolated songs. Yet the connection between song and seizure is not explicit in the text. In fact, a number of nineteenth-century critics wondered at the reason for adding the seizures. Dawson, writing in 1859 claims that they weaken the poem and asks whether "they are to indicate the weakness and incompleteness of the poet side of the Prince's character..."⁵⁴ Dawson's reading of the poem traces an internal movement in the poem whereby the poet-Prince character (Dawson himself conflates them, and Tennyson, in his letter to Dawson, does not disagree) moves from doubt to certainty, from weakness to strength. On this reading anxiety is symptomatic of a poetic weakness that is finally excised from his character as he finds his "rest in his ideal." This reading of the Prince's anxiety, that is, of his weakness which more properly belongs to the province of women, underwrites more normative readings of the poem. These types of readings, emphasizing the need for Aristotelian narrative

normalization, push logically to transcend song (the feminine element), either to incorporate it (as the Princess does as she becomes the maternal-healing figure for the Prince once he is injured) or appropriate it, but to push beyond it nonetheless.⁵⁵

In fact, several nineteenth-century critics of *The Princess* worried over the effeminacy of its language, warning of a “dressy literature, an exaggerated literature,” a softness and effeminacy that is an “evil incident to democracy.” Implicit in many of the critiques is a class bias; only uneducated (i.e. soft, feminine) readers would “go in” for *The Princess*. A more educated readership would reject its generically multiple poetry: “To high thinking and noble living the pure style is natural. But these things are severe, require moral bracing, minds which are not luxurious, and can endure hardness. Softness, luxuriousness, and moral limpness find their congenial element in excess of highly colored ornamentation” (Cook xii-xiii).

Even Tennyson’s friends complained about his sensitivity, his morbidity, his “Germanized, and smoke-sodden temperament.” Why won’t he, Aubrey de Vere wondered, “set about writing like a man?” (Coyle and Cronin 118) Clearly, these terms resonate with Victorian critiques of Romantic era poetry and childishness, of Shelley in particular.⁵⁶ These complaints about Tennyson, in other words, work from both sides; they suggest an untoward and romantic influence from without as well as a moral weakness from within. Even Lady Tennyson remarked in a letter about her husband’s “tenderness of nerve,” which she hoped would not “descend” to her children.” (Ricks 222, 3) In most critical constructions, to speak then of Tennyson’s particular brand of sensitivity, of voluptuousness, is to acknowledge its internalized-historical (his depression in relation to his alcoholic father) as well as its external-

historical character (the pressures of producing a poetry that would serve the needs of the age). But, as I have suggested, there are models of anxiety (birth trauma for example) that make anxiety primary, rather than a symptom. What matters is not the etiology of Tennyson's anxieties so much as their dual points of articulation, which the poet *feels* as internal (personal/lyric) and external (social/longer forms). As Coyle and Cronin suggest, this is a "problem to be confronted by all Victorian poets who accepted that a poem was authentic only in so far as it maintained a lyric voice, and yet aspired to write a poetry that addressed the circumstances of their times."⁵⁷

Tennyson's solution in *The Princess*, to move in a "strange diagonal" (conclusion), to steer a path between lyric and epic, seems to have satisfied almost no one.

And, towards [the poem's] conclusion, issues in a *cambe recota* of all heterogeneous elements—for which it would be difficult to discover a palpable simile, except we find it in a Centaur, "half man and half horse"—or in a mermaid, "a lovely lady with a fish's tail"—or in a Caliban, or in a "Bottom the weaver," with his innocent ass's mouth "watering for thistles"...The general impression left on the mind by 'The Princess' is therefore, as might have been expected, simply the grotesque. 318-9

The term "grotesque" had a certain valence in nineteenth-century poetry criticism, and it comes close to describing what may be the core distaste for the poem: its gender-bending, not to mention its genre-blending, are entirely too close to the surface for comfort.⁵⁸ The fact that Dawson needed both the similes of the centaur and the mermaid suggest that the hybridity in the poem is sexual as well as formal. Yet it is not enough to claim that the Prince's unmanliness and/or the Princesses surplus of masculine attributes are strictly the issue either. Rather the hybridity of the

poetic genres and the hybridity of the represented gender roles are finally and inextricably linked. So when the poem announces finally that women are, or should be, “diverse” from men, we cannot help but hear both “different” and “varied,” as well as “double versed.”

The narrator acknowledges that it was in fact the power of the women and the ballads that forced this grotesque diagonal:

The women—and perhaps they felt their power,
For something in the ballads which they sang,
Or in their silent influence as they sat,
Had ever seem'd to wrestle with burlesque,
And drove us, last to quite a solemn close—

Conclusion 13 – 17

The solemnity of the close can be understood as the effect of a process of distancing. Through the interpolation of the songs, that is, through the insertion of spatial and temporal intervals or interruptions, the poem can finally be “driven” into the world—in other words, put into circulation. As I argue above, Tennyson’s anxiety about releasing poems into the world, the fear that he, or perhaps *we*, will “lose the child,” results in a poem shot through with gaps and fissures, hesitancy and doubt, which critics have read as a sign of effeminacy. In the narrative logic of *The Princess* the Prince transcends his own effeminacy (his epileptic fits) even as it is instantiated inside him through his internal and external linkage with the now reformed Princess: they are two halves of a “two-celled heart.”

Yet each character (Prince and Princess) is also two-celled, or perhaps put more accurately, two-selved. For example, when the Princess reads “Now sleeps the

crimson petal” and “Come down, O maid” to the wounded Prince she is, on one level, fulfilling the woman’s role. She who had previously refused song and the child now takes the place propitious to the feminine. She reads the words aloud, yet the words are meant not to console the injured Prince, but rather to enlighten her. Strangely then, the words come through her and to her and she is, in that moment, both male and female, teacher and taught: “So waste not thou; but come; for all the vales / Await thee...” Granted, Ida is being subjected in this section to a kind of disciplining or normalizing. But I am interested in the degree to which the Prince, although no longer stricken with seizures, still retains the lyrical “half-feminine” character of the true-cast poet. He received his poetic half-feminine nature through his mother: “Happy he / With such a mother! faith in womankind / Beats with his blood...and though he trip and fall / He shall not blind his soul with clay” (VII; 308-12). Terms associated with verse (beating, tripping, falling) recur within the passage to associate him forever with a form of poetic sensibility that seems to have passed into him *in utero*.

Of course the contest between song and mock-heroic need not only be read as allegorical, that is, as a struggle between embodied and intersected gender-traits, but can also be read as a formal intermixing, interfusing, and combining. In fact Tennyson called *The Princess* a medley. That the forms might mix and still refuse synthesis or unification only makes the case for a reverbatory reading that much stronger. The songs force an internal break or interruption in the generic poetic boundaries, much as historical and ideological forces operate to force a movement in the lived (gender, familial, sexual, educational, literary) relations that get represented

and recast within the poem. The break or interval the songs provide—the “breathing space”—acts as a distancing device, similar to the internal-critical distance provided to Tennyson by the image of his still-born son.

Child as Ballad, Ballad as Child

Nineteenth-century critics also saw poetic *form* as connected to social and cultural realms, often in ways that reflect a political conservatism, and usually through appeals to such concepts as “unity.” In this vein, Samuel Dawson in 1882 traced the progressive arc of the first three songs in *The Princess* as: the child as past; the child as present; and the child as future.

We can see now that the unity, which runs through the songs [of *The Princess*], is continuous also throughout the poem; and that the songs are not snatches of melody, thrown in to diversify the interest, but are integral parts of the main motive of the piece. The true sphere of woman is in the family. The grand mission of woman is the conservation and celebration of the human race through the family. For the family is the molecule of society. It is the one and only stable and divinely appointed institution. (Dawson 37)

For Dawson, the ultimate ideological power of the child—revealed in the fourth song “Home they brought her warrior dead”—lies in its ability to stir the “home affection, the moving spring of patriotism and heroic effort” (Dawson 49).

Dawson’s reading is, to my mind, useful in a number of ways. First, Dawson insists on the normative ideological value of the child, “the bond and final cause of the family” (Dawson 31), ever pulling the man towards his proper place of protector of the family and the woman towards her place in the home. This reading of the child as possessing a kind of magnetic cultural force is fascinating in light of Tennyson’s patriotic poems, written pseudonymously in the year or so after the stillbirth, and published in the London papers. Tennyson arguably used these poems (I call them,

after Tennyson's poem "Little Bosom not yet cold..." the "little warrior" poems) to obliquely express the anger and sorrow he felt at the loss of his son, perhaps channeling his rage towards a material and acceptable enemy—France. There seems in other words to be a clear relation between namelessness, stillbirth, domesticity and duty. Secondly, although Dawson conflates the Prince's character with Tennyson's, he refuses any correspondence between the Prince's weird seizures and Tennyson's own doubts about poetic production, doubts that twelve years earlier had been expressed as concern about feminization inherent to poetic practice and the consequent emasculation (the loss of one's name) at the hands of one's critics.

Dawson hints at the concept of a parturient poet/Prince, but never draws the connection out, claiming instead that the Prince's seizures "confuse the simple conception of his character," and perhaps indicate the weakness and incompleteness of the poet side of the Prince's character until he has found rest in his ideal" (Dawson 40). A woman may ultimately complete the poet/Prince, but for Dawson the concept of a hybridized poet is as absurd as arguments for gender equality. Dawson scathingly derides arguments for the "identity of [physiological] structure."

If men were to argue from an undoubted anatomical identity, and if they were to develop their neglected lacteal potentialities, and devote themselves to the alimentation of infants, would any woman be likely to fall in love with a man cultivated in that direction? (23)

Dawson's odd Darwinian image of generation of lactating men is a concept, when de-metaphorized, not entirely foreign to Tennyson's aesthetics. Several critics have pointed to not only the homoerotic character of Tennyson's love for Arthur Hallam (and vice versa), but also the maternal character of that friendship (Reynolds). An

argument against the “poet side of the Prince’s character” is tantamount to an argument against “weakness,” an argument against lactating men and a host of other feminine grotesqueries. Yet the image of a man “cultivated in that direction” is not far removed from that of Tennyson’s “half woman natured...true-cast poet.” Nor is the image far removed from the Prince’s own language of the growth of a “true marriage”—a “two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke, / Life.” Dawson insists on reading the poem as though it were not what Tennyson claims it to be—a medley. Against Dawson, I’m suggesting that unity is an illusion in *The Princess*, a critical projection, and that paying attention instead to disunity, interruptions, what I’ve termed Tennyson’s techniques of distancing reveals a commitment to an aesthetics of process and hybridity, a compositional corollary to the poetics of stillbirth.

So far I’ve been arguing that Tennyson’s authorial distancing seems always to be responding to a dual sense of threat. In other words, poetry and circulation are problematic for Tennyson to the degree that poetic parturiency or productivity leaves the poet vulnerable not only to critique and misunderstanding, but also to experiencing or re-experiencing, through the misrecognition of the other or critic, a primal and irredeemable loss. Thus, as if responding to a mnemonic image or birth trauma of sorts, Tennyson seeks to manage his anxiety by obsessively revising and anonymously publishing his poems, as well as by corresponding with critics about the meanings of the work. The problem for Tennyson is to find a reader capable of adequate response. Hallam had suggested, in relation to Tennyson’s poetry, that readers must exert a degree of effort to understand, and, in some ways, complete Tennyson’s poems. This dictum of “requisite exertion” on the part of the reader

revises Wordsworth's call, in the preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, for a poetry of the common man, suggesting instead that efforts made on the part of the reader might result in a fuller, perhaps *uncommon* poetry. But the need for a more engaged readership heightens the risk for readerly misunderstanding. The generation of poets that immediately preceded Tennyson—Shelley, Keats, Byron—felt⁵⁹ themselves especially vulnerable in this regard. And while ostensibly, longer poems leave more room for misprision, which might explain Saintsbury's assertion of their lack of popularity in the century,⁶⁰ Tennyson felt that in order to really fulfill the role of poet he must produce a longer poem. The prologue, the epilogue, the songs, and the Prince's seizures were all added to *The Princess*, as Hallam Tennyson relates, to "express more clearly the meaning of the 'medley'" (Alfred Tennyson Alfred Tennyson 531). Song then, the "diverse" force is added, on the one hand, to correct misapprehensions, to correct proleptically the "foolish" critics. When clarity was called for, Tennyson reverted (turned back to) ballad and song. So it is that ballad measure, the metrical schematic against which most of the interpolated songs are formed, extends Tennyson's poetics of distancing into the realm of received poetic genres.

Coventry Patmore referred to ballad as an "ancient narrative meter, which, though almost excluded from the 'polite literature' of the eighteenth century, never lost its charm for the people" (45). It is possible (following Matthew Arnold's condescension toward the ballad and its practitioners) to interpret "the people" as bordering on an epithet.⁶¹ There were and are multiple connotations to the ballad of course. As Jason Rudy claims, for example, "the comfortingly predictable Victorian

ballad offers...an impossibly idealized vision of the British nation” (Rudy 591).

Regardless the ideology that ballad reflects at any given historical moment, it is clear that despite the ballad “revival” started by Isaac Watts and James Macpherson, continued by William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans, ballad was never far out of fashion. Furthermore, D. M. Moir, writing in 1856, claims that ballad has a specific *affective* universality:

Common to every human heart there is a certain class of emotions, the expressions of which ‘turn as they leave the lips to song;’ and hence the primitive form of poetry in the ballad. (Moir 117)

Moir’s universal claim points to the stakes involved in this argument—both for this chapter as well as for formalist and historicist criticism of 19th-c poetry more generally. Following an argument I bring forward in chapter 1 but do not elaborate, I am suggesting that ballad measure or hymn measure recurs throughout the nineteenth century as indexical of a loss (nature, national and personal innocence or youth, poetic vision, etc.). This poetry of eternal return is often articulated in proximity to infants, domesticity, pastoral scenes, or memories of childhood—so much so that the signification functions either way—ballad to child or child to ballad. The songs in *The Princess* are one obvious example; Robert Browning’s *Pippa Passes* and “Childe Harold’s Good Night” from Canto One of Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* are others.

Although Tennyson later claimed that ballad or song was not extrinsic to *The Princess*, the fact is that his first emendations/additions to the published version of *The Princess* were minor and contained within the blank verse. Next Tennyson added the songs and expanded the conclusion. Finally, he wrote in the Prince’s weird

seizures. “The songs were never an afterthought,” the poet explains. “You would be still more certain that the child was the true heroine [of the poem] if, instead of the first song as it now stands ‘As thro’ the land at eve we went,’ I had printed the first song which I wrote, ‘The Losing of the Child’ (Tennyson and Cook xxxvi, xxxvii):

The child was sitting on the bank
 Upon a stormy day.
He loved the river’s roaring sound;
The river rose and burst his bound,
Flooded fifty leagues around,
Took the child from off the ground,
 And bore the child away.

O the child so meek and wise,
 Who made us wise and mild!
All was strife at home about him,
Nothing could be done without him;
Father, mother, sister, brother,
All accusing one another;
 O to lose the child!

The river left the child unhurt,
 But far within the wild.
Then we led him home again,
Peace and order come again,
The river sought his bound again,
The child was lost and found again,
 And we will keep the child.

Clearly, Tennyson was right. This song would have made more explicable the now-conventional reading of *The Princess*: it recapitulates the redemptive narrative of the larger mock-heroic. So why does Tennyson not include it? On the one hand of course, it would mean cutting “As Through the Land at Eve We Went,” arguably the better poem.

Beginning with the title, Tennyson seeks to frame the poem within a mythical Blakean structure. Rather than “Losing the Child”—a potential process—we get

narrative definitiveness, determination, and anteriority: “*The Losing of the Child*.”

Further, this title gives us a more classical amphibrach and anapest (as opposed to the more conventional trochee-iamb combination in “Losing the Child”). The poem itself proceeds in a pattern of shorter lines. Thus, from a strictly formal point of view—and by point of view, I also mean the literal way the poem *looks* on the page—the songs introduce 3 and 4 beat lines (i.e. shorter) where previously (I’m reading the poem *as if* it had occupied the place of pride [as the first song of *The Princess*] that Tennyson claims to have intended it to occupy) there had been only been uniform 5 beat lines.

Not only do the songs make a medley of the poem, they set up intertextual and transhistorical resonances. For example, the first and last couplets in each stanza paragraph of “Losing of the Child” replicate exactly the measure of Blake’s “Little Boy Lost,” and “Little Boy Found” from *Songs of Innocence*. In Blake’s companion poems, written in hymn measure (a 4 beat line followed by a 3), God appears in the place of the father and leads the boy home to his mother. In Tennyson’s poem, no such deity is at work. The social and familial structures likewise seem to have failed. Instead, Tennyson uses 3 tetrameter lines with more or less unchanging rhyme in between the hymn measure couplets. The effect is to formally inscribe something like homogeneity and order. The only real difference appears in the middle stanza, when chiasmus (meek and wise...wise and mild) and internal (aural and ideational) rhyme (Father, mother, sister, brother) does the work instead, this time working rather to equalize blame for the loss and resulting disorder, or such disorder as there is in this very tidy poem. The identical rhymes that break out in the final stanza (again, again, again, again) drive home the point of the child’s importance as a symbol, an

arbitrary and appositive sign that stands in for something, reproduces it, in contradistinction to any actual children, whose historical and personal specificity might make identical rhyme tantamount to a form a reification.⁶² For what human subject, even, or perhaps especially, a child, is ever identical with itself, much less with any other?

Tennyson himself though does *not* drive home these points. In fact, the poem remained unpublished in his lifetime. Instead, as we have noted, he interpolates the song “As through the land at eve we went,” which tells the Wordsworthian tale⁶³ of a husband and wife who have a falling out while journeying to the grave of a child “lost in other years.”

As thro' the land at eve we went,
And pluck'd the ripen'd ears,
We fell out, my wife and I,
O we fell out I know not why,
And kiss'd again with tears.
And blessings on the falling out
That all the more endears,
When we fall out with those we love
And kiss again with tears!
For when we came where lies the child
We lost in other years,
There above the little grave,
O there above the little grave,
We kiss'd again with tears.

Immediately we can see that the loss Tennyson imagines as social and communal in “The Losing of the Child” is experienced at a much more isolated, familial, and individual level. The object moral lesson itself is nothing new—Wordsworth’s “Two April Mornings” contains an even more challenging version of “endearing” (can we also hear the less idealistic “all the more endures”?) in Matthew’s “I did not wish her

mine,” i.e. his capitulation to God’s will even on the level of thought or desire.

Although the couple is reconciled in grief (they “kissed again with tears”) at the end of the poem, the child, as a living being, is still lost. As a point of origin for their loss (perhaps even for the strength of their love), it (he, she) is located again, named. It is, in other words, found and lost simultaneously. The form is unfalteringly balladic.

The comforting repetition of the refrain (kiss again with tears) links the form of ballad with a form of mourning, a structure (the primitive form) *and* a drive toward the past (the other years) and the future (blessings whose reverberations move “through the land,” i.e. through the spatial and temporal field of the poem). This is yet another sense in which the poem conserves even (or especially) that which it overtakes. Besides pulling the blank verse of *The Princess* towards loss *and* recuperation, the song compulsively repeats its four-three beat linear structure, and its repeated end-rhymes (note the identical repetition of the penultimate line—is this melancholic “supplement” an early inchoate form [abba] of the *In Memoriam* stanza?).⁶⁴

The poem is built on the irony of the narrator’s repressed understanding of his and his wife’s condition. *We* know why the couple falls out, even as he claims not to know. Presumably, it is easier to *fall out* than to *feel* the full brunt of loss of their child. One gets the sense that this couple peripatetically wanders the countryside, endlessly fighting and kissing. The poem presages the (more self-aware)⁶⁵ reconciliation of the Prince and the Princess. The mock-heroic sections of *The Princess*, the blank verse narrative, does not melancholically incorporate into its narrative structure—at least not as explicitly—the repetitions of falling and rising,

losing and finding. This more cyclical *weltanschauung* is the unique project of the songs.

The border-state that precedes the song seems close in its affective and psychic disorientation to the Prince's strange Keatsian seizures ("I seemed to move among a world of ghosts, / And feel myself the shadow of a dream" [I: 17, 18]).⁶⁶ Keats is an important figure in this regard, not just because one of his most famous ballads—"La Belle Dame sans Mercy"—anticipates Tennyson completely, but because Keats' reception throughout the nineteenth-century was that of a "child" (Arnold), whose verse was too "feminine" (Patmore).⁶⁷ The song's relation to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (specifically, "The Thorn," "Song" ["She dwelt among th'untrodden ways"], and "Two April Mornings") points again to the return of ballad measure as a late eighteenth, early nineteenth-century mode that recurs and generally haunts poetry written later in the century, and Tennyson in particular. The themes of these ballads often tended toward children and childhood.⁶⁸ Ultimately, I'm arguing that the Prince becomes the figure for the poet in the poem. His effeminate fainting spells precipitate nearly all of the interpolated ballads. As his seizures give way to taking assertive action and ultimately to being wounded, the ballad sections of the poem give way to pentameter or 5 beat lines. In this regard the Prince gives birth to a nostalgic form (ballad, says Moir, is the "primitive form of poetry"), a conservative gesture, that, like naming a child for a beloved, deceased person, pulls in both directions, future and past, at once.

By referring to ballad as a "conserving" form or genre, I mean that it carries not only the weight of poetic tradition, but also that it can contain within its generic

structure “certain class of emotions, the expressions of which ‘turn as they leave the lips to song.’” The same is true of blank verse of course, or iambic pentameter in general. But as Paul Fry suggests in his important book on the English ode, whereas other lyric forms seeks to make voice or consciousness present, hymn or ballad seeks to sacralize or praise, i.e. to speak to the Gods or the dead (4-10). Elegiac in form and content, Tennyson’s songs remove the object of the song (principally the child) from the contingencies of the world, the narrative of the idyll, and seal it up within a song of praise.⁶⁹ With “As Through the Land at Eve We Went” as the first song, loss is sealed up within the verse form (not enjambed and broken with caesuras as is the blank verse) at the same time as it conserves within the “form” (one might even say that it buries it) its affective or emotional content. To “kiss again with tears” is the perfect emblem for a poetry that is always being born again, but always haunted by a primal loss.

And We Shall Keep the Child

The repetition of poetic form (by Tennyson) and ritualistic mourning (by the characters of the song) reproduces Freud’s argument about the compulsion to repeat in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Setting aside (see above) Freud’s scandalous postulation of a death drive, whereby living matter strives continually toward its earlier non-living state, it is in this essay that anxiety as a conservative force is first and most fully treated.⁷⁰ According to the logic of the essay, trauma can sometimes break into the psyche, usually on account of an “absence of preparedness for anxiety” (38). Unpleasurable and unconscious repetitions—compulsions to repeat—occur in order to “master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose

omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis” (in a note, translator James Strachey goes on to say that “Freud is here implicitly stating that the development of anxiety is the means of producing preparedness for anxiety” (39). Freud’s premise, articulated more forcefully by Melanie Klein is that anxiety is productive. Much like the formal elements of a poem, anxiety’s *function is to bind energy* (Beyond the Pleasure Principle. A New Translation by James Strachey 68). Tennyson’s anxious revision of *The Princess* may itself have been an attempt at retrospective mastery, merely one mode of distancing, of establishing a stillborn relation to the poem. The poem initially *did* receive many unfavorable and lukewarm reviews, which may have prompted the successive revisions.⁷¹ His use of song as an interpolated interruption returns us in form and content to the thematic and the topos of the stillborn, or *lost*, child. Also, ballad as a historical form may be said to interrupt Tennyson’s “innovative” blank verse epic—giving it “breathing space.”⁷² And finally, the vulnerability of the child, and indexically, the culture, is the primarily “message” of the most of the songs.

More generally, I’m arguing that ballad (archaic forms in general, but especially ballad), as a primitive form of poetry, is consonant with Freud’s concept of a death instinct, whereas the blank verse of the verse drives forward toward unity and creation. Not in any essential way, but as a literary-historical construction, ballad pulls toward the archaic historicity of poetic forms, i.e. toward death, disintegration, stasis, even as it is in the process of being born. Ballad is, in a certain sense, *always already born dead*. The normative blank verse, in contrast, pulls toward narrative unity. Ballad, elegiac and nostalgic, regresses toward a place before what Freud

conceived as stasis, a place, that is, before the trauma of birth. As we have seen, Freud's romantic formulation of anxiety in birth trauma, like Tennyson's recursion to ballad and the Prince's strange seizures, describes a formal *breaking through* of the present ("reproduced as an affective state" it gives "certain characteristic *forms* of expression"). It corresponds to something elsewhere but in so doing it brings that elsewhere *affectively* present, coloring the present with the opaque content of the past

After the Prince is injured, a song ("Home They Brought the Warrior Dead") is sung whose argument is that a failure to respond to grief results in an entombment of that very grief (not repression says Freud, rather a wholesale incorporation).⁷³ Typical of all the songs in *The Princess*, it does not correspond *directly* to the action of epic section of the poem, in which the Prince has just been wounded. The ballad instead describes a more generic scene and places an orphaned infant where none exists in the longer text. The Princess, cold and imperious, must grieve, say her handmaids, or else she will die. The refusal to respond to the dead hero or the child—neither the literal child that Ida claims as her own, nor the analogized lover-child of the Prince—results in a breach between her and her people, a political ramification that is inferred in other sections of the longer poem and seems directly determined if not signified by her inability to mourn. The failure to relate to her people has potential gender implications of course. Presumably the court would not be as scandalized had a *king* or *prince* refused to publicly mourn. The Princess's refusal of the ballad and the child, not of its sentiment per se but of its "already existing image," illustrates the political as well as cultural and social power of its (ballad's and the child's) characteristic and embedded form.

In the final strophe, an older nurse named Rose (“Rose” here recalls both Tennyson’s lost love Rosa Baring and Blake’s prophetic ballad “The Sick Rose”) acts responsibly (i.e. she responds to the other).

Rose a nurse of ninety years,
Set his child upon her knee--
Like summer tempest came her tears--
'Sweet my child, I live for thee.'

The wintery Rose is restored to summer, and that restoration reverberates outward toward the community. As I have shown, Tennyson’s contemporaries were cognizant of how the child is used in the poem as a spur to domesticity and nationhood.

Throughout *The Princess*, the repetition of scenarios in which a child is worried over, or in which the Prince is reduced to a state of dependence resembling that of a child, works to “develop” the anxiety (in Freud’s sense) and to disperse it over the wide political, cultural, and ideological field that the poem represents, and to which it is addressed. The form of the appeal is ballad measure or song.

In a fragment from the *Memoir*, written at roughly the same time as the letter quoted above, Tennyson muses over the child.

Dead as he was I felt proud of him. To-day when I write this down,
the remembrance of it rather overcomes me; but I am glad that I have
seen him, dear little nameless one that hast lived though thou has never
breathed, I, thy father, love thee and weep over thee, though thou has
no place in the Universe. Who knows? It may be that thou
hast....God’s Will be done. (II 14)⁷⁴

I do not mean in any way to schematize or reduce Tennyson’s emotions at the loss of his actual child. But to read child-as-poem in this passage is to witness a transformation made possible by the image of a stillborn child. Exactly two years before the still-birth in April, Tennyson wrote “The Losing of the Child”: “The child

was lost and found again, / And we will keep the child.” The “dear little nameless one” who lived yet did not breathe is finally outside of the poet, lost *and* found, functions like a poem that circulates between readers.

The distance created by Tennyson’s surrender (“God’s will be done”) and made possible by the displacing doubleness (lost and found) of the figure of the still-born child allows the poet once again to speak as father *and* poet, that is, to express a judgment even about that which is nearest to him because it is no longer an undifferentiated object; it has an exterior existence, a place in the universe. A still-born poetry and poetics mediates between the dictates of the drive toward publication, recognition, preservation and the drive to be enmeshed, “immoored,” inanimate. The poem, like the “nameless” child, may have a place outside the poet yet, not only in the “pamphlet pampered age,” but also within a larger genealogy, one that traces the uses and the afterlife of a still-born poetics and poetry that not only moves from mouth to mouth, but also from hand to hand.

¹ Compare the closed circuit of human need in Tennyson (“Her subtil, warm, and golden breath, / Which mixing with the infant’s blood, / Fulfils him with beatitude” [60-63]) to the universal blessing Wordsworth bestows upon the child (“No outcast he, bewildered and depressed; / Along his infant veins are interfused / The gravitation and the filial bond / Of Nature that connect him with the world” [241-44]).

² See my chapter 1 for my reading of “The Intimations Ode.”

³ “The joy I had in my freewill / All cold, and dead, and corpse-like grown” (16, 17).

⁴ The loss Tennyson speaks of (a loss of the child) should be differentiated, although it is clearly not an entirely separable phenomenon, from the discourses of early childhood mortality and infanticide, both of which have received considerable critical attention in the last few years. See Kipp and Esther H. Schor, Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1994)..

⁵ See Steedman and Shuttlesworth for arguments about the importance of the child to scientific and philosophical discourse in the nineteenth century. For an essay concerning ballad measure, forced memorization, and childhood in the 19th-c see Catherine Robson, “Standing on the Burning Deck: Poetry, Performance, History,” PMLA 120.1 (2005).

⁶ Turner quotes Tennyson as referring to Tintern Abbey as being “‘full for me of its bygone memories,’ and expressing ‘the sense of the abiding in the transient,’ as well as his habitual ‘passion of the past’” Paul Turner, Tennyson, Routledge Author Guides (London ; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) 110. See also Stephen Charles Gill, Wordsworth and the Victorians (Oxford [England] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1998) 195.

⁷ Wordsworth's death: 1850; *The Princess* published: 1947, 48, 50; *In Memoriam* published 1850.

⁸ For a contrastive theory of poetic allusion see Andrew Elfenbein, "Paranoid Poetics: Byron, Schreber, Freud," Romanticism on the Net (2001), vol. 23. Also see Andrew Bennett, Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism; 35 (Cambridge, U.K.; New York Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹ I am not the first to argue that Tennyson "sought to relieve" "personal anxieties" in the poem, but to my knowledge, mine is the first reading to articulate the relation of "the loss of child" to ballad stanza, Christopher B. Ricks, Tennyson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 174.

¹⁰ cf. Dorothea Olkowski on Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty: Irigaray calls for a transformation of the relation of matter to form and the *interval* between them. She argues that there has to be a change in the interval, which she identifies as relations of nearness and distance between subject and object, and thus also a change in the economy of desire, a different relation between man and gods, man and man, man and woman (Irigaray 1993a, 8; 1984, 15–16).

¹¹ Tennyson and his readers would have recognized and been familiar with the majority of theoretical ideas in this chapter, especially given that the Freud that I reference (the biological/anthropological theorist) operates out of deep Darwinian tradition Cf. James Eli Adams, "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin" Tennyson, ed. Rebecca Stott (London; New York: Longman, 1996)..

¹² Cf. Gill, Wordsworth and the Victorians 203.

¹³ Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, ed. Diane Price Herndl Robyn R. Warhol (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ For the infant's place in philosophical accounts of subjectivity, in this case an associationist one, cf. "On Sympathy" Arthur Henry Hallam and Thomas Hubbard Vail Motter, The Writings of Arthur Hallam, Modern Language Association of America. General Series. 15 (New York, London: Modern language association of America; Oxford university press, 1943) 133-42.; for the infant's role in theories of poetic language and development see P. B. Shelley's opening paragraphs of "The Defense of Poetry." Percy Bysshe Shelley, Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, Shelley's Poetry and Prose : Authoritative Texts, Criticism, Selections. 1977 (New York Norton, 1977) 480, 81.

¹⁵ Alfred Tennyson Tennyson, Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar Finley Shannon, The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap, 1981) Vol II, 14.

¹⁶ That the stillbirth happened on Easter is deeply significant to Tennyson, suggesting that Christ the sufferer occupies a privileged position over the little warrior figure (see note on "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" below).

¹⁷ cf. Tennyson's own gendered theory of epistolary exchange: "A brief and terse style suits the man, but the woman is well when she deals in words" (I: 176).

¹⁸ Tennyson, Lang and Shannon, The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson Vol II, 15. It is interesting to compare "Little Bosom" to the description of King Arthur in "Morte D'Arthur (204-220). What does it mean to kill off your hero (this poem was written first and then appended to the *Idylls of the King*) before the story even begins? I thank Marjorie Levinson for pointing out this connection.

¹⁹ Jonathan D. Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981) 142.

²⁰ Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," A World of Difference (Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Johnson suggests that the "lost child" hovers beneath the figure of apostrophe and furthermore, that their may be a "deeper link between motherhood and apostrophe" (198).

²¹ I want to further acknowledge two very different attempts to think the relations between authors, each of which revises Bloom in interesting and important ways: Bennett, Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity.; Elfenbein, "Paranoid Poetics: Byron, Schreber, Freud," vol.

²² The critical trajectory I'm alluding to extends from Harold Bloom to Gilbert and Gubar. For "intrusion": psychoanalyst/theorist Andre Green names "intrusion anxiety" as the anxiety of penetration, and sees it as opposing "separation anxiety" which corresponds to anxiety around castration.

²³ D. W. Winnicott calls this cultural work object *usage* rather than object relations D. W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality (New York: Basic Books, 1971) 96, 7. See also Isobel Armstrong, The Radical Aesthetic (Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). and Mary Jacobus, The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)..

²⁴ “Typing,” as can be seen by looking at Tennyson’s late ballad “On One who Affected an Effeminate Manner,” has a dangerous edge: “While man and woman still are incomplete, / I prize that soul where man and woman meet, / Which types all Nature’s male and female plan, / But, friend, man-woman is not woman-man.” Christopher Ricks points also to *The Princess* vii: 281-2, and vii: 268 in the 1847-48 text.

“Typing” is an especially important term because of its common usage in philology as well as in the discourses of science and moral philosophy: to “type” an attribute is to typify or exemplify it. In fact, typology as a stable category, as way of knowing the world in an absolute sense, was being reconceived at precisely this moment. As the work of natural scientists such as Robert Chambers shows, nature, which had been classified into rigid types throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was being revised such that the “‘Unity of Type’” [was] seen to be secondary to that of ‘Conditions of Existence.’”

²⁵ For the implications of the commodification of the poet’s name see: Anna Jane Barton, “‘What Profits Me My Name?’ The Aesthetic Potential of the Commodified Name in Lancelot and Elaine.(Victorian Poetry)(Essay)(Critical Essay),” (Victorian poetry)(essay)(Critical essay) 44.2 (2006): 136. Tennyson also published the first version of *In Memoriam* anonymously (Shatto 22). See also “Ulysses”: “I have become a name.” In this regard, c.f. Deleuze: following Stoic philosophy, and commenting on the *effects* of bodies, Deleuze identifies “surface effect” as having the syntactic property of an infinitive. Thus, Ulysses’ string of infinitives at the end of the poem—to seek, to strive—frees him from the concretization of his name. Likewise the still-born child or poem is freed from the convention of naming.

²⁶ “The depth-surface distinction is, in every respect, primary in relation to the distinctions nature-convention, nature-custom, or nature-artifice” (186, 87) Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989)..

²⁷ The oral fixation of “from mouth to mouth” is also an anticipatory echo of the narrator’s intention to share the story of *The Princess* with his classmates: they will pass the story “from mouth to mouth” (prologue 189).

²⁸ Christ is Tennyson’s exemplar in this sense, as can be gleaned from the manuscript version of “Locksley Hall Sixty Years After”: “our greatest [Christ] is man-woman” Alfred Tennyson, The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher B. Ricks (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1969) 1424.

²⁹ Freud suggests that a compulsion to repeat unpleasurable and dangerous scenarios is a way for the ego “to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis.” Tennyson, by forcing his *own* sexual-poetic hybridity to the center of a poem about critical misprision and poetic alienation creates the maximal anxiety with the minimum of gestures; readers, poets, and critics alike are forced to confront the more dangerous and subversive aspects of authorship, its tendency toward recursivity, inwardness, as well as its yearning to return to pre-differentiated states. Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle. A New Translation by James Strachey, International Psycho-Analytical Library. No. 4 (New York: Liveright, 1950) 39.

³⁰ The identification of reader with Other is a hallmark of literary criticism and is consistent with nearly every theory of subjectivity and authorial reception and exchange we have (Lacanian, Marxist, Feminist, etc). Furthermore, as Althusser recognizes, Lacan translates Hegel’s “recognition” into the entrance into the symbolic, the “objectivizing language that will allow [the child] finally to say “I,” “you,” “he,” or “she,” which will thus allow the little being to situate himself as a *human child* in the world of adult thirds” Althusser, Corpet and Matheron, Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan 26. See also Kojève and Queneau, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel 40.

Tennyson frames subjectivization in similar terms, through the babe at the mother’s breast in *In Memoriam*: “But as he grows he gathers much, / And learns the use of ‘I,’ and ‘me,’ / And finds I am not what I see, / And other than the things I touch”

³¹ “As a poet Tennyson prefers to take his stand not in an enclosed and private world nor in a public arena, but in the shadowy borderland between them” Coyle and Cronin 114.

³² e.g. Ricks’ suggestion that Tennyson regarded his own “despondency” as deeply rooted in his heredity or Buckley’s suggestion that Tennyson buried “the griefs of his childhood...coalesced with his intuition of a larger reality” Jerome H. Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, Riverside Studies in Literature, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) 21.

³³ This anxiety about reception recalls A. H. Hallam’s argument about Tennyson’s poetry in *On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry...* Hallam writes that readers should assume some of the responsibility, through erudition or simply through difficult work (Hallam calls it “requisite exertion”), of the construction of meaning in a poem. Tennyson, upon the experience of the intervening decade or so between Hallam’s essay and “Wherefore in These Dark Ages...”, does not seem to have faith in Hallam’s reader; Perhaps, for Tennyson, there is only one originary reader who can be trusted with the requisite exertion of readership, and he—Hallam—is dead. Hallam and Motter, ““On Sympathy”,” 188.

³⁴ Melanie Klein theorizes two positions that the infant, and in this case I would argue the poem, can inhabit. Either the child/poet can occupy the paranoid-schizo position—marked by persecution anxiety and a failure to conceptualize or organize raw sensory material and internal and exterior objects—or he or she can occupy the depressive position, in which case organization, or what Klein calls “grouping,” is more possible. (See my Chapter 1.) Klein suggests that one can move between these positions, in what she terms a “quick change-over” (276).

³⁵ For the mobility of the child-subject in philosophical, aesthetic, and political discourses see Jo-Ann Wallace, “Technologies of ‘the Child’: Towards a Theory of the Child-Subject ” Textual Practice 9.2 (1995): especially 297-8.

³⁶ This question of control extends to versions of his poems as well. Upon the first publication of “In Memoriam,” Tennyson wrote to a friend to request that all errant copies of the poem should be returned or cremated.

³⁷ Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle. A New Translation by James Strachey 53.

³⁸ *ibid* 68.

³⁹ Freud seems embarrassed to have “steered our course into the harbour of Shopenhauer’s philosophy” Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle. A New Translation by James Strachey 67. As Derrida points out, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud seems quite tentative about claiming for certain that there really *is* anything “beyond” the pleasure principle.

⁴⁰ Lacan, in an essay entitled “Alienation,” theorizes a moment of splitting for the subject *before* the entrance of language. Complicating his own linguistic theory of the subject, he pushes back the moment of I/thou separation to the moment of sexual differentiation in the womb: “Sexuality is established in the field of the subject by a way that is that of lack” Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (London: Hogarth, 1977).

⁴¹ Freud himself gave little time or space to this primal separation. Otto Rank and Geza Roheim on the other hand made “birth trauma” central to their respective theories of psychology and culture.

⁴² See my introduction for my argument for non-Oedipal theories.

⁴³ Mneme, an early twentieth-century concept put forward Richard Sémon, is the “effect of stimulation on the irritable substance.” It leaves an afterimage, and “engram,” in (on?) the memory, which can be activated at a future point. Of course, the concept had been available, under different names, for at least half a century prior to the time of Tennyson’s career of which I write. Charles Bonnet, who was translated into English early in the nineteenth century, and was read by Samuel Butler among others, writes that memories are “connected to the body,” and therefore “modify” the body, resulting in a “physics of memory and recollection.” The point being that mnemonic images imprint themselves on the body, waiting in latency, and that “true-cast” poets may be more vulnerable to the impact of their inevitable return. Freud had at least two books by Sémon in his library.

⁴⁴ See John Killham, Tennyson and the Princess: Reflections of an Age ([London]: University of London, Athlone Press, 1958) 6-8.

⁴⁵ See Killham, Tennyson and the Princess: Reflections of an Age 1-19.

⁴⁶ “...and the women sang / Between the rougher voices of the men” (Prologue 236, 7).

⁴⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, I'm going to treat ballad and song more or less interchangeably, as Tennyson does in *The Princess*. Unlike Tennyson, in those cases where a poem is in ballad measure, I will make a distinction between them, purely for reasons of keeping clear the separate strands of my argument. When I speak of the songs in terms of their ideational impact, their function or their "meaning," I'll refer to them as songs; when I speak of the actual meter or prosodic content, I'll refer to them as ballads.

⁴⁸ See George Brimley, *Essays* (London :: MacMillan, 1868) 92.

⁴⁹ See for example Wallace's comments on Tennyson's blank verse in Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess: A Medley, with Introduction and Notes by Percy M. Wallace, M.A.* (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892) xx-xxiii.

⁵⁰ Interesting that Saintsbury chooses a term (bonus) from the lexicon of epics (and classical philosophy) to describe the effect of song.

⁵¹ Most commentators make the assumption that Tennyson means us to focus primarily on Psyche's child, appropriated for a time by Ida, as the "child" in the songs.

⁵² Consider chapter III of *Jane Eyre*. Jane, still shaken after being locked up in the "red-room," (significantly, the room in which Mr. Reed had died – death is song's perennial subject), is comforted by hearing Bessie, the maid and closest thing to a maternal, loving presence for Jane, singing a ballad.

⁵³ The term "nerve language" comes from Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Mental Illness*, which details his psychic breakdown in the eighteen eighties and nineties (his second/last hospitalization would have been roughly contemporaneous with Tennyson's death). Nerve language is a useful term to interrogate here, not just because the two texts (Tennyson's poem and Schreber's memoir) and their (critical, historical, biographical) contexts contain so many correspondences, but also because, in the literature of post-modern cultural and poetic theory, Schreber has come to stand for surface, exchangeable subjectivities, and post-modern emptiness (Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, etc.) Langan's essay deals with the primarily with S. T. Coleridge and what she sees as corollary processes at work in Schreber's conception of nerve language and Coleridge's Christabel – an "'interior' language of thought," that can be opposed to speech or narration per se. Celeste Langan, "Pathologies of Communication from Coleridge to Schreber," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.1 (2003): 147. Elfenbein's essay focuses on Schreber's use of romantic poetry in his essay, Freud's "defensive reaction to sexuality," and what emerges as a "paranoid theory of authorship." Elfenbein, "Paranoid Poetics: Byron, Schreber, Freud," vol.

⁵⁴ Samuel Edward Dawson, *A Study: With Critical and Explanatory Notes, of Alfred Tennyson's Poem the Princess* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1882) 49.

⁵⁵ See "How do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Mille Plateaux. English (Minneapolis :: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 149-66.

⁵⁶ See especially Coventry Patmore's essay on Shelley.

⁵⁷ John Coyle and Richard Cronin, "Tennyson and the Apostles," *Rethinking Victorian Culture* eds. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England] : New York: Macmillan Press ; St. Martin's Press, 2000) 122. See also Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*.

⁵⁸ Isobel Armstrong comments on Walter Bagehot's description of Robert Browning's poetry as grotesque, a description that would seem to apply to *The Princess* as well: "The wrenching of metrical pasterns, the heterogeneous vocabulary compounded of aggressive colloquialisms and highly literary fragments of poetic diction, these together have an eccentricity which is appropriate to call grotesque" Isobel Armstrong, *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969) 93.

⁵⁹ See Shelley's "Alastor," and "On Life"; see canto I of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, etc.

⁶⁰ John Killham makes the point that there was a kind of upsurge in longer poems in the years that Tennyson produced *In Memoriam* and *The Princess* Killham, *Tennyson and the Princess: Reflections of an Age* 1.

⁶¹ Arnold on Homeric translations.

⁶² There is a further analogy to be made between "The Losing of the Child" and Blake's "Little Girl Lost" and "Little Girl Found" in *Songs of Experience*. Lyca becomes one with nature in such

a way as to re-naturalize her civilized surroundings. In a similar way, the “river find[ing] its way again” in Tennyson’s poem suggests a reciprocity with the natural world. Again, the difference is that Tennyson encloses nature within a mythological or classical narrative. For Tennyson’s classicism see A. A. Markley, Stateliest Measures : Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁶³ Although reductive when applied as a strict schema, it is useful to think about what it means that Tennyson chooses a Wordsworthian “lyrical” ballad over a Blakean “song” to be the first of the songs in *The Princess*. Prophecy and (direct) allegory are forsaken for the sake of intimacy and narrative: sound is fore-grounded. A stuttering melancholy in “As thro’ the land at eve we went” takes the place of the happy ending of “The Losing of the Child” (clearly more a song of innocence than of experience).

⁶⁴ Tennyson had written many, many of the cantos for *In Memoriam* over the years preceding publication; one assumes that he was intensely comfortable in this stanza form. Furthermore, Alicia Ostriker argues that a metrical examination of the first two editions of Tennyson’s poems (1830 and 32) finds the poet attempting to develop a “flexible” stanza form, which could be used to produce “serious and substantial work” Alicia Ostriker, “The Three Modes in Tennyson’s Prosody,” PMLA 82.2 (1967): 280. What she describes is roughly a ballad structure – mostly isometric, tetrameter lines, more than half of which “build on that strong rock of English stanzas, the simple quatrain” (279).

⁶⁵ Although I cannot comment on them here, there are significant class and cultural implications implied by the rural couple’s melancholic inability to become self-conscious about their losses versus the Prince and Princess’s self-consciousness, revelation, and redemption. Ballad is traditionally associated with the less educated and sophisticated (See Arnold, Patmore, and More).

⁶⁶ Keats usually gets mentioned in relation to “In Memoriam” (Najarian). Harold Bloom, of course, recognizes the deeper influences and even reads “Tears, Idle, Tears” (unquestionably the most well-known song from the longer poem) as a revision of “To Autumn” 140, 41) as proof.

⁶⁷ Recent monographs on Keats have focused on his arrested youth and his ambivalent sexuality. My argument about song in *The Princess* (always pulling back towards a moment before sexual differentiation) and its ubiquitous and lasting association with the child occupies some common ground with these texts. For the association of elegy and the feminine from the 18th century onward, see Schor. Schor’s analysis of Joseph Trapp’s critiques of elegy is helpful in that it identifies the feminine not so much with the unmanliness of feeling as with the specific formal (unruly) elements of the verse (22, 3).

⁶⁸ The conscious framing of the balled sections (sung by the women, brought on by the Prince’s seizures, etc.) recalls Wordsworth’s early use of frame narratives in “Michael,” “Two April Mornings,” and “The Ruined Cottage.”

⁶⁹ The unavoidable referent here is, of course, Wordsworth’s ballad “A Slumber did my Spirit Seal.”

⁷⁰ The other text is “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety” from Volume 20 of the Standard Edition.

⁷¹ See, again, Killham, Tennyson and the Princess: Reflections of an Age 11-16.

⁷² Andrew Elfenbein claims that when poets allude to other poets, there is a sense in which they are defending not only against the brilliance of the father (i.e. it is not merely sublation), they are also defending against the brilliance of their own innovation. Elfenbein, “Paranoid Poetics: Byron, Schreber, Freud,” vol.

⁷³ Freud here makes way for a topographical model of the psyche in this essay, arguing that huge portions of the ego are unconscious.

⁷⁴ I recognize that the child’s “place in the Universe” probably refers to his status as an unbaptized infant. My argument would be, again, that given Tennyson’s economy of grandeur for the child, this theologically displaced state (a nameless object unable to be brought under any institutional concepts) would seem to be part of its power and beauty.

Coda:
The Space of Breath
and the Problem of Causation

Here there is a sort of question, call it historical, of which we are only glimpsing today the *conception, the formation, the gestation, the labor...* in the face of the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as it necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity (Derrida 293).

I had no idea the journal of my own disposition and feelings was so intimately connected with that of my little baby, whose regular breathing has been the music of my thoughts all the time I have been writing (Gaskell 8).

If in fact, as I have argued, poems and people, histories and desires reverberate continuously then accounts of them, critical *or* poetic, are always partial, and, in some sense, resist reiteration if not totalization. Yet I will try here to attend to the job at hand, to summarize what this dissertation has argued and to point toward ways in which these readings and methods might be integrated into the critical discourses of Romantic and Victorian poetry. First, I will recount in a loose way the gist of each of my chapters with a special emphasis on what I call the problem of causation.

Causation or determination is of course a critical term in the humanities, especially since the advent of the new historicism. I argue that the concepts of reverberation and the spatialized temporality of infancy allow us to theorize how interpretation might still matter despite the problems of causation. The model of transference, because it happens on either side of acts of reading and writing (text and poet, poet and reader, reader and text, reader and poet, etc.) helps us to see how interpretation is potentially an intensely ethical act. Finally, as a means of articulating how these findings and tendencies intervene in our critical moment, I will read each of the two epigraphs for

this coda, paying specific attention to moments of critical reverberation and intersection.

I have throughout this dissertation attempted to account for several textual moments when infancy was presented as a concept, a concern, or a spatial-temporal dimension. The themes of reverberation, disorientation, and transference have been touchstones in each of the chapters. And while I claim that the space or spatialized temporality associated with infants and infancy is unique, there is a sense in which other terms might have sufficed to produce similar effects or arguments—for example, memory, or innocence, or loss, or origin. I began in Chapter 1 by interrogating not a poem per se, but rather an idea, namely, Wordsworth's concept of immortality. Its checkered reception throughout the nineteenth-century tells us much about what Victorian era poets and critics thought was achievable in terms of recuperating lost glory, poetic power, and innocence. Yet importantly, my reading of Matthew Arnold in particular show how profoundly ambivalent he was about renouncing those possibilities. In fact, he never lets go of them completely. Instead, he makes claims for their continued presence in nature. This is how I read his claims about Wordsworth's style, that is, that nature may have written Wordsworth's poems for him. Immortality, on this reading, is just another term for breathing space, a way to slow and spatialize the on-rushing temporal torrent that is life and death, writing and thinking; you may recall that Wordsworth's figure for this unstoppable force is a river or stream. Arnold, and, to a lesser degree, Mill, recognize that Wordsworth has arrived at immortality through a transcendental deduction. Arnold critiques Wordsworth's generalization but cannot entirely dismiss its reverberative power, the

ways in which infants haunt and recur throughout his own poems. Wordsworth serves, perhaps predictably, as a father figure for both Mill and Arnold—in Mill’s case, as the figure who could banish his own severe father, and for Arnold as the progenitor of the poetic legacy he was handed. Yet what emerges is not so much an Oedipal struggle as a transferential one.

By that I mean that when Mill and Arnold write about Wordsworth’s poetry their prose and thought seems clear-headed, and without idealizations. They both admit to their identifications with Wordsworth. And yet, each seems to have a blind spot when it comes to his engagement with the figure of immortality. Another name for the seeming certainty of these critics is transference. Lacan reminds us that the work of transference happens when there is a closure in the unconscious, that is, when things suddenly seem most clear. Both Mill and Arnold are crystal clear about Wordsworth’s philosophy; it is, they both agree, wanting. Yet Arnold cannot escape immortality in his poems, which leaves its mark in the empty stare of an infant or the mocking face of a silent nature. Similarly, Mill experiences a paradoxical recovery from unhappiness because he is able to “remember” a childhood he seems never to have had. Transference then, as a mode of criticism, reverberates in both directions. That is, we can see the blind spots in Mill and Arnold’s accounts and we notice that they are most acute at the moments of maximal certainty. Likewise, both critics apprehend Wordsworth’s theories (i.e. his bad philosophy) at the moment when he (Wordsworth) seems most surefooted, that is, when he argues for an anterior life for the infant.

I refer in the chapter to Wordsworth's spatialization of infancy, especially in section IX of the ode, as a radical rethinking of temporality, progress, and development: "Hence in a season of calm weather / Though inland far we be..." What I did not touch on in the chapter, but which seems clear to me now, is that this spatialized relation to origin and immediate experience seems to undermine the transcendental or necessary posit of immortality. Critics have argued that Wordsworth, when he returns to the poem after several years, revises it in order to answer his own question.¹ But it seems to me that if the answer of an anterior life for the infant, as well as the compensatory offerings of "the philosophic mind" for the adult were sufficient we would not need to "travel thither," that is, to retain the mobility of (spatio-temporal) *position* that Wordsworth ascribes to the soul, and that I have claimed as one of the characteristics of his concept of immortality.

In other words, there may be a center of experience, a "time" of freshness and light, but neither Wordsworth, nor Mill, nor Arnold has access to it directly, not because they are grown, but rather because it only becomes available through the interaction with someone or something else, through spatialized or altered temporality, through transference, through interpretation. Thus, even Wordsworth's ode, arguably, the most solitary and solipsistic of poetic arguments, becomes most readable through a reading of its reception; it requires the presence of an "other."

The aesthetic claims of S. T. Coleridge and Erasmus Darwin similarly deal with the problems of origin or causation. The two prose passages that serve as examples of competing aesthetic theories describe two very different experiences for infants at the mother's breast. Darwin, attempting to explain our love of curved and

shapely art, ascribes a bodily pleasure to our experience of the aesthetic. Coleridge, on the other hand, attempts to describe the origin of religious feeling, primarily as a displacement of erotic or pleasurable sensations with the mother. Space here functions differently than it did in Chapter 2. Intimacy and inches replace grandeur and continents. Yet the same issues recur. As when Arnold and Mill applied Wordsworth's theories, so too aesthetic or religious applications of Darwin's and Coleridge's theories seem unworkable in practice. On the one hand, Darwin's account infantilized our aesthetic judgment; on the other hand, Coleridge's theory of the origin of the idea of God, sacrifices the mother, indeed all human relations, and places them in the category of shapes rather than forms.

It becomes impossible in these passages to sort out where the mother begins, the infant ends, and the aesthetic object or deity comes into being. In other words, it becomes increasingly difficult to find a balance between the desire for separation and the desire for unity. It is only in the readings of the poems, when strange temporal and logical gaps appear. Consider Darwin's gigantic earth mother, whose breasts become the pumps of industry. Here the question of causation, already vexed in Darwin's prose account, is even further muddied. Does she resemble technology or does technology copy the perfection of the feminine form? Or consider Coleridge's literal inability to *think* the birth of one son or to *accept* the death of the other. The turn toward God is mediated by the mother in either case. Yet the moment of indecision, the moment of spatialized temporality, when what is shape and what is form is entirely undecidable—these are the most ethical, original, and honest moments in the poems.

My chapter on Sara Coleridge extended the ethical premise, or promise, suggested by her father's ambivalence. Not only does the question of causation and reverberation come into play with Coleridge's concern for her children but it informs her relation to her father as well. So many reverberations occur throughout the chapter—opium, dead children, poems, guilt, fame, religious and philosophical musing. Coleridge's improvisatory and contingent ethical investment in the world, what I have called her extended asceticism, always accounts for the presence of the other. Perhaps that is the function of the infant, to hold us to account. This call or ethical demand could explain some of our cynicism when it comes to confronting the figure of the infant directly. Of course, the relation between idealism and ideology, not to mention the problem of reverberation, makes it impossible to approach the infant (read origin, nature, innocence, memory) directly.

What is more, the demand to be accountable can be onerous, as Tennyson realizes with his poems. If poems, like babies, reverberate in a reciprocal thick temporality such that it is unclear where the poem ends and the "self" begins, then Tennyson's stillborn poetics allows for a kind of breathing space, in which the reverberations of critique, circulation, and consumption are slowed down. It is not merely that Tennyson revises a stillborn form, namely ballad, in order to intercut his longer blank verse poem. It is also that he complicates any questions of causation, in part by claiming that he had always intended to include the songs and in part by attributing the songs to the women rather than the narrator/Prince/poet.

The problem of causation, of writing from some *place* other than within the discourse one is critiquing is of course the central concern of Derrida's version of

post-structuralism. The quote that I offer as my first epigraph to this coda is from Derrida's inaugural statement of this claim in "Structure, Sign, and Play." I claim here in part as a vindication of my interest in babies, dead, living, remembered, and imagined, but also to claim more concretely the ways in which a reverberative poetics might chime with both the ethical and methodological concerns of post-structuralism. If, as I have been arguing, the separation that I spoke of in my introduction can be addressed in and through the breathing space of writing, reading, listening, and speaking, it most likely cannot be completely closed or sutured. Derrida identifies the desire for unification with the desire for a center to the structure. He does not say that there *is* no center to structures; on the contrary, he claims that there is no place from which to speak other than from *within* the discourse or system that you are trying to critique. Derrida acknowledges his own embeddedness—in language, in metaphysics, in history—at the end of his essay. He suggests that there are two pathways by which we may "interpret interpretation," either the path of Levi-Strauss (a belief in a decentered center from which we might speak) or else the path of Nietzsche (a skepticism about all origins). Characteristically, Derrida, like the infant Freud references in his essay on splitting the ego (see Chapter I), refuses to choose—which of course, is itself a choice. And there is a kind of Coleridgean silence at the end of Derrida's essay, "a momentary pause in the thought."

I take the "unnamable" presence in Derrida's essay as being that which displaced structuralism's claim to certainty about the world and the text—ideology critique, feminism, deconstruction, new historicism, etc.² And I take Derrida's reference to the "historical" character of the question to point to the ways in which

these questions are themselves reverberative, that is, they continue to recur. I am interested in Derrida's discourse of gestation, parturience, *and* history insofar as it suggests the ways in which reverberation opens a spatialized temporality by or through which the historical—be it personal or collective—might be heard or felt more clearly in the temporary slowing of reverberation.

Derrida explores this concept in the essay “Coming into One's Own.” He uses the term superposition (rather than opposition) to describe Freud's multiple lines of filiation to his grandson in the “fort/da” narrative in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” When this essay is interpolated into *The Post Card*, superposition gives way to “folding back,” from “*Repliez*,” the imperative of *replier* (to fold up again; withdraw back; roll back; pack away; double over). It seems to me this tension between an overlay (surface) and a revelation (depth) forms the core of Derrida's difficult ethics. I'd like to keep both figurations in play—that is, I'd like to insist on the sense of something underneath every displacement, no matter how thin the material that is folded back.

Finally, reading Elizabeth Gaskell's diary, my second epigraph to this coda, shows the ways in which the breathing of an infant might be “intimately connected” with “the music of [one's] thoughts.” In fact, I first began thinking about this dissertation when my oldest child Ella was an infant. I was an undergraduate at the time and my wife worked late as a waiter. Therefore, on most nights it fell exclusively to me to care for Ella until about 2 or 3 in the morning. Often, I would rock her to sleep with a bottle and I would be unable to sleep myself. We lived in street-level, rent-controlled apartment on a busy corner in San Francisco. The street-lights

would pour in through the cross-hatched windows, throwing diagonal shape on the kitchen and hallway floors. Ella would be in my lap or on my shoulder. It seems to me now that she weighed less at that time than a book, or a jacket, or a pillow. I was surprised to find myself at these moments jotting down notes for song lyrics, poems, essays, or letters to her that she would read when she was grown. Besides the constant sounds of traffic and the occasional late-night reveler, her breathing would be the only sound in our apartment. What was I doing? Who was I addressing...myself...her...her as a grown-up...myself as an infant? Of course there is no absolute answer to these questions. Maybe, like Gaskell, I was becoming “intimately connected.” Or maybe, like Shelley’s infant / poet, I was simply reverberating, simply prolonging the pleasure, and the consciousness of the cause.

But here I find a central problem in Shelley’s thesis. It might be more accurate to say that I was prolonging the “*unconsciousness* of the cause.” I might have had some consciousness of the cause of my pleasure or my pain. But I still can’t quite say what that cause *was* exactly, or it seems double, or it changes. I think may also have been feeling something on a bodily level, something I had long intuited, namely, that all relationships exist in a double space and time. There were other kitchens at other times, such as the one I remember from one of my earliest memories, my grandmother’s stern face as I threw my uneaten toast from my high-chair to the floor. There is also the kitchen where we live now, pale green, where Ella helps with the dishes and likes to sit at the table and read. These temporal and spatial displacements or screen memories are, of course, the stuff of poetry. In *A Defense of Poetry* Shelley distinguishes poetry from prose by arguing that whereas time destroys

narrative (Shelley says time “strips” it), time “augments” poetry. What are destroyed are the particulars, which for Shelley are unimportant compared to “eternal truth.” But what kind of eternal truth can exist outside of particularity? Shelley suggests that at its most basic level, this kind of poetic truth is synonymous with pleasure and pain³ The poet “is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude” (486). Yet even in this scenario the poet is not alone. There are “auditors...entranced by the melody...who feel they are moved and softened” (486). There is a space, containing at least or potentially two, in which something happens, with or without consciousness of a cause.

Back in San Francisco, the semi-gloss yellow paint of our kitchen (I’d painted it myself when we moved in) made the room what musicians and sound engineers would call “live,” that is, it threw back sound rather than absorbing it. If you clapped your hands in that kitchen you would hear a quick reverberation as a retort. The good news, from an acoustical point of view is that a live room has natural reverb. The bad news is that such a room, if one is recording what happens (and writing *is* recording), is more likely to create a feedback loop. But the slowness and evenness of the middle of the night, Ella’s steady breath, even the disorientation produced by sleepiness, stress and joy, all collaborated to create what seems to me now a pleasing reverberative space.

I begin to close my dissertation with this memory, this second-order reverberation, in order to illustrate not only how tactile and seemingly mnemonic breathing space is, even after nine long years, but also to foreground the importance of a bounded, safe *space* within which to feeling and thought might reverberate. As I

indicate in my introduction, the psychoanalytic situation offers potentially such a space, as do the acts of reading and writing.

In many ways then, my dissertation was born with my daughter. But, as Derrida points out in “Structure, Sign, and Play,” events are ruptures *and* redoublings. Derrida’s (and Nietzsche’s) critique of nostalgic yearning after origins then might be more reverberative than echoic. Following that line of reversal, it may be that the beginning I had in mind for this dissertation, the yellow kitchen late at night, only *became* a beginning when I typed the paragraph earlier this afternoon. This awareness is part of a transferential reading, one that considers the ways in which poems and memories create unique spaces of reverberation. Christopher Bollas, writing about expression in the counter-transference, makes just such a claim. In what follows I replace the word “patient” with “poem,” and the word “analyst” with “reader.”

[Poems] create environments. Each environment is idiomatic and therefore unique. The [reader] is invited to fulfil [sic] differing and changing object representations in the environment...For a very long period of time, and perhaps it never ends, we are being taken into the [poet’s] environmental idiom, and for considerable stretches of time we do not know who we are, what function we are meant to fulfil, or our fate as [its] object... (202, 3)

What Bollas is asserting is the possibility of “externalization.” In other words, being with a poem or an infant or another person need not result in a “projectively-identified psychic life.” It may instead be an opportunity for the “creation of a total environment,” in which reader, writer, child, parent, self, other, poem might “pursue a ‘life’ together” (202). Of course, I easily could have substituted “infant” for “poem,” and “poet” for “reader” and the passage would describe many if not all of the poetic

encounters with infancy I have written about in this dissertation. The “necessary uncertainty” (203) Bollas describes reproduces Arnold’s confrontation with the Gypsy child, S. T. Coleridge’s confusion when coming face to face with his infant son and his new role as father, Sara Coleridge’s sense of being physically merged with her children, literally trapped in their (preverbal) environmental idiom, and finally Tennyson’s intense identification with his still-born son. (On the level of narrative, Princess Ida is similarly disturbed by the environmental idiom of the child—indexed not only by so-called maternal feelings the child is meant to evoke in her, but also by the formal qualities of song or ballad measure itself.)

Finally, to return to my title, taken from Tennyson’s *The Princess*:

And let the ladies sing us, if they will,
From time to time, some ballad or a song
To give us breathing-space...
...and the women sang
between the rougher voices of the men,
Like linnets in the pauses of the wind

It is important to remember that breathing space (the songs interpolated into the blank verse) was added, *after the fact* by Tennyson to correct for the fact that the “public did not see the drift.” Thus the breathing space itself is thick with reverberation, that is, revision, recursivity, history. Notice that the ladies sing us “from time to time”—that is, we are carried by their songs back to, or forward to, another time. Between the pauses of the wind (remember Coleridge’s pauses of the thought) we may hear pauses of the breath, of spiritus. The men are made less rough—Shelley says we are “softened” by the song of the poet. But if in breathing space we are softened we are

also made rougher. For what these poems and poets tell us is that there is always reciprocity between reader, writer, parent, child, poem, and poet. There is no in “between” the rougher voices—the songs reverberate with what came before and what comes after. There is only in-the-middle-ness, a slowing down of the patterns of reverberation perhaps, enough to glimpse, or just to feel what Tennyson termed, writing on the occasion of his surviving son Hallam’s birth, the “divisible-indivisible world.”

¹ William; Stehpen Gill Wordsworth, William Wordsworth: The Major Works (New York: Oxford World Classics, 1984)., p. 714.

² Geoffrey Hartman makes a similar point in “The Use and Abuse of Structural Analysis” Hartman and O’Hara, The Geoffrey Hartman Reader., 98.

³ “There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, universal, and permanent; the other transitory and particular” (500); a poet is “sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and that of others, in a degree unknown to them” (507).

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