I COULDN'T KILL IT ANY OTHER WAY: INFANTICIDE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

by

Deirdre Day-MacLeod

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1996

UMI Number: 9707084

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

8/6/96
Date

NK Miller
Chair of Examining Committee

8/7/96
Date

Executive Officer

NK Miller
Nancy K. Miller

Anne Humpherys
Anne Humpherys

Carolyn Heilbrun
Carolyn Heilbrun

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

I COULDN'T KILL IT ANY OTHER WAY

INFANTICIDE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

by

Deirdre Day-MacLeod

Adviser: Professor Nancy K. Miller

This dissertation looks at maternal infanticide in texts by William Wordsworth, Walter Scott, George Eliot, and Harriet Beecher Stowe in order to trace a relation between the rise of a discourse of the moral mother in the Eighteenth century and literary depictions of infanticide in the Nineteenth century. In Wordsworth's "The Thorn" (1798) infanticide provides a means to express anxiety over modernization, industrialization and authorship in a revision of the traditionally oral and rural ballad. *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) by Sir Walter Scott tells the story of the effects of an infanticide that has never occurred suggesting maternal infanticide is a text rather than a reality. Scott's use of infanticide, like Wordsworth's, expresses a relation between genre and figure. In this case, the historical romance and

euphemism coincide to express concerns over gender and national identity. The maternal body represented by Euphemia, the mother accused of infanticide, like the figure her name reflects, both conceals and displays itself. Scott's Madge Wildfire and George Eliot's Hetty in *Adam Bede* both come upon configurations of landscape that explicitly echo the little mound of dirt described by Wordsworth's narrator. While Madge Wildfire's story relates to what has occurred in the past and what is buried in a specific geographic space, by the time of Hetty Sorrel's infanticide in *Adam Bede* (1859), the plot is already written and is in fact inspired by the particularity of the landscape: a place that does not contain a child cries out for one.

British representations of infanticide express anxiety over social transformations relating to class, gender and industrialization, describing infanticide in terms of the corruption of landscape. American texts, on the other hand, stress race and anxiety related to trouble inside the household, making the family the metaphoric equivalent of the nation. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) takes the sentimental novel-- a genre that gives mothers power and fetishizes their children--to represent infanticide as the natural result of the unnatural institution of slavery. In contrast to British infanticide, Stowe's American version represents infanticide as a heroic act.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This list of names is not sufficient to show how much help I needed and how much I got in writing this dissertation. I want to thank first the friends and colleagues who were patient with my incomplete sentences and fragments of thought: Jay Prosser, Mary Beth McMahon, Lorna Smedman, Celia Bland, Ruthe Thompson, Sharon Kraus and Sasha Troyan. The support of Renee Rubin at the Park Slope Child Care Collective gave me the time to write knowing that my daughter was in the best hands. Without Renee's generous spirit and kindness I could never have written this. I also want to thank Dr. Jacobus Schmidt who told me I couldn't quit while I was angry and made it so I had to keep on going. I want to thank especially my adviser, Nancy K. Miller who alternately cajoled and encouraged, and without whom this would still be a pile of disconnected thoughts shot through with typographical errors. Dr. James MacLeod helped pay for the things two graduate students with a baby couldn't possibly afford. My own parents, Esther and John Day gave me time, space, money and a wonderful little car. The two who suffered the most over this writing, Sinead Day MacLeod and Dewar MacLeod, merit thanks that no words can convey. To them I dedicate this piece hoping only that it justifies their faith in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Prologue

The New York Times tried to find reasons why Susan Smith, a woman described as a "perfect mother," would kill her children. Even as the body of the article recited a litany of facts--the suicide of her father, the financial and emotional stress of raising two children alone, the dead-end job in a mill, the break-up of a relationship--the headline writer chose to write, "Life of a Mother Accused of Killing Offers No Clues." Seeing only from the point of view of the children, strapped into their safety seats drowning as their enigmatic mother stood by silently, the news reporters were unable to see reason in her actions. Smith's own reasoning seems to defy logic. Susan Smith felt that she could not be a good mother, so she had to kill in order "to protect us all from any grief or harm,"(Nightline 11/6/94). Even at the moment of killing her

children, she could not admit her own interests: the possibility that she had her own reasons to wish to be free of her children. Instead, Smith insisted that even in this moment of murder she was operating from the point of view of a mother concerned only in the well-being of her family.

Susan Smith's case tapped a wellspring of fascinated media coverage--Media Medea, some called her. Other cases of maternal infanticide occurring in the same time period received much less attention from the press. A 19-year old from Clearwater, Florida, unable to afford an abortion, put a gun to her stomach and shot herself in the womb, killing the 6 month old fetus inside her. A welfare mother of two in Bakersfield, California was charged with murder after the amphetamines she had taken to "stay awake" entered her breastmilk and her child died. A woman was stopped at Kennedy airport with the corpse of her own newborn hidden under her clothes.

While Susan Smith's bonds to her children were no longer as confusedly physical as those of Karen Henderson or Kawana Michele Ashley or Carolyn Beale, the manner in which her desire for autonomy clashed with the reality of bearing and raising children resembles theirs. Although she performed the role of the perfect and bereft mother for television cameras, the circumstances of her off-camera life seem to point out the problems inherent in Smith's desire to appear perfect even as the

children lay dead. I want to argue that the role of the good mother and Smith's desire to enact it for the nation were intrinsically tied to an opposition between good and bad mothering.

In the tangle of bodies and motives, "clues" become contested. The detectives in Susan Smith's case claimed to first recognize her guilt when she used the past tense to refer to her children (Nightline 11/6/94). A mother who wanted her children back would have refused to believe them dead. Like the impoverished, unwed mothers in Victorian infanticide trials who evidenced maternality through the display of hand-knit booties, a good mother would deny the real world. Susan Smith's lawyer now tells reporters how she dreams of her children at night in her jail cell.

In trying to untangle the mother from the child, we seem inevitably to slip into the safety seat and distance ourselves from the mother.

The actual occurrence of infanticide occupied headline space for weeks as I wrote this dissertation. I felt it impossible to talk about infanticide without beginning with the most notorious case in recent history. The story of Susan Smith, or rather the story that appeared in the newspapers and on television, illustrates how close we

remain to the debates over infanticide which raged in the nineteenth century. Susan Smith's case and others like it are only steps away from the intense argument over abortion which employs many of the same rhetoric, logic and illogic which the infanticide furor did.

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the way authors wrote about infanticide in the nineteenth-century. I am interested in the way that nineteenth-century society militated against a perceived threat of infanticide. I focus most upon the writings of authors who considered themselves in some way literary, either because like Wordsworth and Eliot they write to change the world of literature, or like Stowe, they write to change the world outside. In many ways the boundaries of author and text mimic or duplicate the boundaries between mother and child, and the author's purpose in bringing forth a text is itself fraught with anxieties. The way the danger of infanticide was depicted in the works of novelists and poets demonstrates the complicated position of the mother, at the same time as it seems to reflect directly upon the complicated position of the author. Despite the obvious differences between the actual death of children and the death of fictional babies and despite the hundred years and an ocean separating the events, the rhetoric employed by commentators on Susan Smith's case so clearly echoed that used a century ago to describe infanticidal mothers.

In the weeks following the incident, John D. Long Lake, where Smith drowned her children, became a sort of hallowed spot for pilgrimages of parents and children. A pile of flowers--both real and artificial--toys, and Happy Meals marked the shores as strangers tried to prove that they would care for the children whose mother had killed them.[1] Wordsworth's murky pond and stunted thornbush, Scott's pool, Eliot's puddle also mark the scenes of infanticide in literature. All three authors focus on landscape as integral to the story they tell. The setting of the scene is not extrinsic to the story but a fundamental part of it; the relation of nature to the story of an unnatural act seems central to this relation. Although the position of women in society has changed remarkably in the past hundred years, the discourse surrounding the crime, both in the way the mother is depicted and in the mother's mind as well, has remained remarkably the same. The conjunction of a universalized maternal image and specific issues of class and racial identity persists today even as it did over a century ago. Even if the realities of day-to-day existence differ across the boundaries between different mothers, it seems that the ideal of motherhood ties mothers together over time. It is impossible to separate the real lives of mothers from the ideology of motherhood.

---

[1] The New York Times report quotes a biologist from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources who calling the lake "some sort of religious Mecca to people" (New York Times, January 22, 1995).

Motherhood has a long history in feminist writings. Simone de Beauvoir describes the bond between femininity and motherhood in *The Second Sex* (1949): "It is in maternity that woman fulfills her physiological destiny" (484). Beauvoir links maternal love to sexual love: "Like the woman in love, the mother is delighted to feel herself necessary; her existence is justified by the wants she supplies." Mother love differs from other kinds of love because "what gives mother love its difficulty and its grandeur is the fact that it implies no reciprocity." The mother gives her love without expecting anything in return. This incredible selflessness on her part is the "generosity" that Beauvoir says "merits the laudation that men never tired of conferring upon her . . . (509)" Feminists since Beauvoir have suggested that the vision of the selfless good mother is a fiction designed to make women conform in a patriarchal society. In *The Dialectic of Sex (1971)* Shulamith Firestone demands "the freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction" and so rejects even the biology of maternity (221). Adrienne Rich's ground-breaking *Of Woman Born* suggests an end to what she calls the "institution of motherhood."

The theme of ambivalence haunts the figure of the good mother who is so often accompanied by the image of the bad mother. Her enormous generosity comes at a price. For who would want to be a mother and have to sacrifice all of her own desires for those of an infant incapable of even understanding that there are other people in

the world? Who would accept a burden so unrelenting and give in to a demand so all-encompassing?

In an attempt to move mothering away from its location in female bodies and make that amazing generosity described by Beauvoir more broadly useful, American feminists have engaged in an attempt to remake mothering. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) argues that mothering itself is not a simply biological function but has been internalized by women and men through the "developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which women have mothered them" (39). Chodorow argues that even the current familial arrangements are asymmetrical. Boys' and girls' egos develop differently as a result of being mothered by a woman. Whereas girls experience a fluidity and connection with others, boys develop more rigid ego boundaries and come to a sense of self through differentiation from the mother. Drawing upon psychoanalytic object-relations theory Chodorow suggests that mothering is transmitted from generation to generation, as girls learn to mother from their mothers. Sara Ruddick suggests mothering arises out of itself, is something learned, and the ethics of mothering are not essentially feminine traits, but can be learned by men. In her essay "Maternal Thinking" (1989), Ruddick defines mothering as the commitment to meeting the demands of children through "preservative love,

nurturance, and training" (17). Both Chodorow and Ruddick stress that mothering is not a complex of traits accessible only to women. Both call for a sharing of the roles traditionally considered "motherly." These characteristics are the same ones that Beauvoir has noted, the selflessness and boundless generosity of the mother. These claims seek to expand motherliness, justifiably separating mothering from its biological location, and these feminists also insist on the inherent virtue of motherliness, universalizing the experience of mothering.

Even for the ideal mother, the one who is, in Beauvoir's terms, the lover beyond all lovers, asking for nothing in return for her love, there is another side to mothering. The mother is not permitted to have any desires of her own. Reconciling feminism and motherhood has been for many woman an impossible task, as if the two are somehow naturally at odds. In *Inventing Motherhood* (1983) Ann Dally argues that "women find it impossible to be committed to both feminism and motherhood" (168-169). The implication is that mothering requires an abandonment of self incompatible with feminism.

Thus the means to acquiring power is denied to the mother. Rich's ambivalence comes across clearly in the chapter entitled "The Heart of Maternal Darkness" which begins with a story of infanticide. Like Rich's analysis of motherhood which recognizes that violence is an integral part or mothering, Beauvoir

herself sees the all-giving mother as potentially murderous. The demands of mothering fuel an ambivalence that slips into violence:

> During the pregnancy such a woman had only to abandon herself to her flesh; no initiative was called for. Now she is confronted by a person who has rights to be considered.... Even nursing affords such a woman no pleasure; on the contrary, she is apprehensive of ruining her bosom; she resents feeling her nipples cracked, the gland painful; suckling the baby hurts; the infant seems to her to be sucking out her strength, her life, her happiness. It inflicts a harsh slavery upon her and it is no longer a part of her: it seems a tyrant; she feels hostile to this little stranger, this individual who demands her flesh, her freedom, her whole ego.... Psychoanalysts agree that mothers who are obsessed with the idea of harming their infants and who imagine horrible accidents feel toward them an enmity that they force themselves to repress (508-509)

In *The Mother/Daughter Plot,* Marianne Hirsch writes that as long as feminism can see motherhood as part of a patriarchal structure--in a position of weakness-- feminists will have trouble dealing with motherhood. Hirsch ties some of the discomfort of feminist thought with motherhood to a wish to avoid intimate connection to the body as well as to an ambivalence over power and authority. Hirsch sees that maternity

provides a unique means of confronting problems of essentialist thought:

> By taking on the notion of essentialism so directly--maternity...poses the question of the body as pointedly as is possible.... The perspective of the maternal makes it difficult simply to reject the notion of biology and forces us to engage both the meaning of the body and the risks of what has been characterized as essentialist. (12)

Before feminists can claim power without intense ambivalence, Hirsch insists that they must confront their difficulties with maternal issues.

Although Hirsch questions whether psychoanalysis with its devotion to the voice of the child can ever serve the mother, feminists have consistently engaged in a dialogue with the field. Madelon Spengnether, Shirley Nelson Garner and Clara Kahane have suggested in their collection of essays *The (M)Other Tongue* that the problem with a feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis arises from the silence of the mother in the psychoanalytic realm. The Freudian story gives the girl the baby instead of the phallus and any woman who is not satisfied with being a mother is lacking. Mary Kelly's art and writings have examined the problem with this narrative from the viewpoint of Lacanian psychoanalysis and feminism. Kelly's writings attempt to reclaim the mother's voice in the psychoanalytic sphere. Similarly the maternal language posited by French feminists rests upon a powerful pre-linguistic bonding

between mother and child. No words are used and thus the maternal body functions as a medium for a different kind of communication, one that is outside the realm of patriarchal linguistic structures. Julia Kristeva's suggestion that the mother lies in the realm of the "abject" puts the mother in a separate position from the men and childless women. The mother resists the Father and his position in the Symbolic realm of language. In her *Powers of Horror* (1982) Kristeva rehearses yet another splitting of the mother into horrifying and angelic portions. In her famous essay "Stabat Mater" Kristeva writes in two voices, as one side of the page is occupied with a poetic and confessional language while the other proceeds in a more academic, traditional mode. Kristeva makes a powerful argument about the impossibility of locating the mother. The maternal is "an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent" (99). While Kristeva suggests that the mother occupies a special space, her attempts to delineate this position tend to make the mother again into a idealized figure with no voice of her own. American feminism's more pragmatic placing of motherhood as virtuous is not dissimilar to the French feminist situating of motherhood as privileged in a more metaphoric sense. Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray seem also bound to recognize the ambivalence such a position requires. Domna Stanton's essay "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva " argues that "To displace/replace the maternal as the metaphor for female

difference, and to conceive more compelling metonymic visions, may not be feasible at present, but must become the possibility of the future" (177). In spite of the problems in the use of metaphor, when Kristeva speaks of the mother as the site where "nature and culture confront one another," the word "confront" ought not be taken lightly.

Complicating motherhood's position as a repository of hopes and fantasies, the "myth of the perfect mother" in the words of Susan Contratto and Nancy Chodorow, calls forth fears of maternal omnipotence (1990). The idea of a naturally nurturant and powerful motherhood is a myth we cling to most vehemently. Even mothers themselves wish for the power while recognizing its limitations. Jessica Benjamin has written about the dangers inherent in the idea of omnipotence. Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory rests upon an intersubjective relation between mother and child. The mother is no longer an object there to fulfill the baby's needs. As Benjamin puts it in *The Bonds of Love* (1988):

> The idea that mother is or should be all-giving and perfect (just a kiss away from all-controlling) expresses the mentality of omnipotence, the inability to experience the mother as an independent existing subject.... The symbolic structure of gender polarity produces the fantastic ideal of motherhood even as it stimulates the fear of destroying all maternal goodness (Benjamin 214).

An implication common to the work of Jessica Benjamin, Melanie Klein and Susan Suleiman is that the impossible ideal of the good mother necessitates the creation of a bad mother.

I want to associate good and bad mothering and read texts of the nineteenth century which contain maternal infanticide. The most powerful articulation of the problems of motherhood arises in the discussion of maternal infanticide, the story of the most terrible mother of all. In this dissertation I will look at the way both male and female writers in the nineteenth century made use of infanticide. This time period provides a particularly fertile era for examining the split between good and bad mothering because of the intense idealization of motherhood. Prior to access to reliable birth control, women had limited choice and so being a woman meant being a mother even more than it does today. The fear of maternal infanticide seems to have arisen out of these circumstances.

Margaret Homans has demonstrated that although women writers in the nineteenth century placed motherhood within patriarchal images of power, they also demonstrate the power of the maternal. Homan's *Bearing the Word* focuses on the mother's relation to the symbolic realm of language to suggest that women have a particular relation to language. Although Homan's argument is unique, it seems commonplace to talk about motherhood as one of the most revered nineteenth-century

symbols. Jessie Bernard analyzes how the image of the good mother was a nineteenth-century invention. Nancy Cott, Barbara Welter, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and other historians have all discussed the rise of the "moral mother" and the "cult of true womanhood" in the United States. Nina Auerbach and others have discussed a similar idealization of the woman that occurred in nineteenth-century Britain. Yet, there is a need to differentiate between a narrative that prescribes maternal goodness and the fissures apparent in this story even from its inception. Hirsch has argued that "the nineteenth-century heroine, determined to shape a different plot for herself, tends not only to be separated from the figure and the story of her mother, but herself tries to avoid maternity at all costs" (14). Recent work, such as Jill Matus's *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (1995) has begun to focus on social and cultural debates in conjunction with literary texts.

Even though much has been done to establish the existence of such concepts as "the cult of true womanhood" and the existence of the "moral mother," what needs to be examined is no longer how the good mother was put in place, but how the bad mother is really the same thing as the good mother. The two are intimately related as the mythic ideal mother gives rise to her evil other. As Rozsika Parker has written in her new book, *Mother Love/Mother Hate* (1996) ambivalence is the refusal to integrate love and hate. The refusal to deal with negative feelings does not erase

negativity, Parker argues, but rather forces it underground where it can cause grave damage. Parker suggests that ambivalence is a useful tool and that the recognition of her negative feelings can be useful to a mother.

The problem in the works I will read lies in the inability to reconcile the ideal of the mother with realistic expectations. The difficulty that Parker sees mothers having in reconciling their own violent sensations is magnified in literature. The mother pictured as inhumanly nurturant and her other inevitably negative side split off. The wish to hide from negative feelings leads to a splitting of the mother. What is the end result of the refusal to voice anger? As Marmee March in *Little Women* (1868) tells her daughter Jo: "I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo; but I have learned not to show it; and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so" (68). This dissertation argues that the good mother suppressing her rage is also the murderous mother.

In the nineteenth century, infanticide appeared as an aberration even while appearing constantly. Some infanticide writings called for reform like George Moore's *Esther Waters (1894)* and Disraeli's *Sybil (1865)* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Matthew Arnold suggested in his description of the "Wragg case" that infanticide was a sign of civilization's decline. Wordsworth, Scott and Eliot put infanticide at the heart of their writing in ways that are more subtly

connected to social conditions.

Moving from the social conventions of the nineteenth century which equated woman and mother, I argue that the emphasis on the moral power of motherhood resulted in a new fear of infanticide, at the very moment of its waning as a social reality. The texts I examine exaggerate the fear of infanticide and perform a doubling of mothers, so that good and bad mirror each other. Further, I suggest an ideological dimension to the depiction of infanticide that can be seen in the association between the act of child murder and certain rhetorical figures. Thus, each chapter situates the discourse of infanticide through ideological, generic and figurative analyses.

Chapter One. "The Sins of the Mothers" examines how infanticide in the nineteenth century became inscribed as a discourse. In legal and medical texts infanticide took on a very specific meaning. I take a broad view of infanticide through history to show how infanticide developed as a concern after 1800. In this chapter, I show why the discourse of infanticide gained particular strength in the mid-nineteenth century by associating it with the idealization of motherhood. Chapter One makes clear how the nineteenth-century discourses of law and medicine made use of infanticide and relates the depiction of infanticide to social changes related to the growth of capitalism and industrialization.

Chapter Two. "Three Feet Long and Two Feet Wide: The Landscape of

Infanticide." William Wordsworth's and Samuel Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) mark the beginning of British Romanticism. At the heart of this book Wordsworth conflates mother and woman through an idealization of nature. "The Thorn" (1798) expresses anxiety over modernization, industrialization and authorship in a revision of the traditionally oral and rural ballad. Wordsworth's deployment of the plot of maternal infanticide, common to the ballad form, switches from the convention of a child returning to speak of his murderous mother to a landscape evoking the infanticide plot in the mind of an observer. At this moment the speaker identifies with the child at the expense of the mother. This chapter operates on three levels, in the text itself, in broader literary history, and finally in terms of Wordsworth's own relation to procreation and creation, a relation dictated, I suggest, by its social context.

Chapter Three. "The Impermeable Heart of Midlothian: Infanticide and the Problem of the Historical Novel." Walter Scott depicts infanticide in a manner similar to Wordsworth-- as an emblem of undecidability. While "The Thorn" makes what is unknown a part of the process of reading and the frustrated desire to know becomes aestheticized, Scott's novel *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) tells the story of the effects of an infanticide that never occurs and suggests maternal infanticide is a text rather than a reality. The character accused of infanticide Euphemia--Effie--Deans has been a victim of the concealment laws. Euphemia's name expresses a relation to the

trope of euphemism and suggests that language and femininity work in opposition to action and masculinity in regard to the legal system. Dismissing infanticide as a creation of law and lawyers, Scott yet retains it in a subplot related to witchery and superstition. Thus Scott's plot, reflecting and denying the generative power of the maternal body, masculinizes what was previously a female genre, the historical romance. Scott, like Wordsworth, wrests creation out of the hands of females--witches, midwives, mothers--and places it firmly in the professionalized sphere of lawyers and writers.

Chapter Four. "Hetty's Sorrel's 'passionate, passionless lips.'" Scott's Madge Wildfire and George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel come upon configurations of landscape that explicitly echo the little mound of dirt described by Wordsworth's narrator. While Madge Wildfire's story relates to what has occurred in the past and what is buried in a specific geographic space, by the time of Hetty Sorrel's infanticide in *Adam Bede* (1859), the plot preexists Hetty's entry into it, and is inspired by the particularity of the landscape: a place that does not contain a child cries out for one. Hetty Sorrel's decision of how to kill her baby is not a choice at all--"I couldn't kill it any other way"--and represents how Eliot's renunciation of female ambition can be seen as the narrative equivalent of the trope of catachresis--"I couldn't say it any other way." The question of whether or not to kill itself is completely avoided as if it cannot even be

voiced. For Eliot infanticide as a plot is precisely delineated by a literary convention that dictates a certain path for female characters.

Chapter Five. "Sentimental Infanticide in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." British representations of infanticide express anxiety over social transformations relating to class, gender and industrialization, describing infanticide in terms of the corruption of landscape. American texts, on the other hand, stress race and anxiety related to trouble inside the household, making the family the metaphoric equivalent of the nation. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) takes the sentimental novel, a genre that gives mothers power and fetishizes their children, to represent infanticide as the natural result of the unnatural institution of slavery.

The rhetoric which draws a line between the mother and the child, between a child and the world outside, lopsidedly gerrymanders what is and what isn't a child. The line between the mother's body and her child's continually shifts. Photography and drawings depict the fetus floating like an astronaut in empty space. Abortion becomes an intrusion into the discrete body of a baby and thus cannot be interpreted as anything but infanticide. On the other hand, pro-choicers argue that the fetus is part of the mother even as the very same photographs make this argument specious.

The debate over abortion which occupies so much headline space and vitriolic rhetoric (on both sides) began in the nineteenth century where the ground rules were

initially set down. The line between infanticide, a murderous act, and abortion, a less serious offense, was set in England as the boundary between reason and unreason and the vagina functioned at the edge. A child within its mother was not considered to have the capacity to reason, nor to be considered "reasonably" a human. Like the modern idea of the viable fetus, life was not aligned with the capacity to breathe so much as the potential to reason. Those who oppose abortion position it as infanticide and make the fetus into a human. A pamphlet on the "partial birth abortion" makes clear that the boundary of the vagina is not sufficient. By entering into the mother's body to find the human, though, the pamphlet denies the mother her humanity. Focussing rather on the angelic face of the aborted fetus, the pamphlet distributed on street corners ignores both of the fetus within a woman's body and the situation of the woman herself are ignored. E. Ann Kaplan has written that the use of photography to emphasize the fetus as human creates a frame that is the maternal body. Like Wordsworth, who makes a feminine nature frame the corpse of the murdered child, such representations make all of the world outside into the mother. Thereby all that is threatening and dangerous becomes maternal. The position of the fetus within another body is denied so that the mother herself becomes the world. Kaplan's reading usefully illustrates how the rhetoric itself creates a narrative whereby the only human in the picture is the unborn baby thus the only possible reading of the story leads to

infanticide. The invisible mother has no existence beyond that of a harsh and murderous other. In her article on the laws governing abortion, Reva B. Siegel argues that the issue of abortion should be considered not as one of whether or not the child is alive within the mother so much as whether the mother should bear the responsibility of continuing that life.

Anne Roiphe writes in an op-ed piece in the New York Times (Sept. 19, 1996) that the mistake in arguing a choice between life and choice is a error in strategy. The real distinction is between ways of living lives. Rather than seeing life as automatically a positive experience and denying the difference in qualities of life, the pro-life movement refuses to differentiate, refuses to distinguish between the life of a child born severely damaged or a child who is born impoverished, to the lives of mothers. Rather, the pro-life movement insists on mothering as if the physical act in itself were enough and as if breathing itself were life enough. Ignoring on one hand the context of a fetus within a mother's body, it also denies the context of a mother within the world. Roiphe's criticism extends to supporters of legal abortion who, she declares, have ignored the existence of life.

The alternative to a choice between life and choice, Siegel argues, is to look at the result of a ban on abortion which would require women to perform unpaid labor. In this manner the right-to-life call for a ban on abortion can be seen clearly as a

means of forcing women into the position of mothers, a role which has historically been an unequal one in our society.

Looking at the rhetoric surrounding infanticide in nineteenth-century texts serves to show how the debate over abortion was framed a hundred years ago and how much it arises out of the desire to control women--a fear of the unmotherly woman--rather than from the wish to save children. By looking at infanticide I wish to show how even what seems the final and logical endpoint of the abortion debate, the place where right-to-lifers would see no black and white, infanticide particularly in cases of newborns has itself a history of characterized by argument and inconsistency. The confusion generated by infanticide seems to me the same brand of confusion that the debate over abortion ought to occasion. There is clearly no way to be certain and no way to be unambivalent about either side of the argument. Women who choose "life" are no more likely to be "good" mothers as women who choose "choice" are necessarily "bad".

The refusal to give voice to maternal ambivalence causes a fear of its most horrifying manifestation, infanticide. The daily examples of the anger of mothers are quelled until the anger erupts with shocking and dismaying force. I want to show how the bad mother is the good mother. As Rozsika Parker writes: "a deeper understanding of the production, purpose and prohibition of maternal ambivalence can

enable mothers (and others) to see that most mothers are neither as 'bad' as we fear, nor as 'good' as we desire" (xii). In literature ambivalence can be read in ways that are reflective of "real life" but are in many ways easier to discuss precisely because they are not invested with the same degree of emotional power. Susan Smith's infanticide is not equivalent to Hetty Sorrel's, even though similar ideological circumstances may have given rise to both. Reading one can, however, throw light, if not on Susan Smith's motivations, then on the way that her actions reverberated throughout society. When Susan Smith expressed her wish to be a perfect mother she demonstrated how close the good mother and the bad mother are.

Chapter One

The Crimes of the Mothers

An opinion, frequently of late expressed by those who ought to know the truth, has gained pretty general credence, that child-murder and the cognate offences are becoming more frequent in this country, and that, numerous as are the cases which are detected, those which escape discovery are still more numerous.

George Greaves, "Observations on some of the Causes of Infanticide." *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society 1862-63.*

...[T]he feeble wail of murdered childhood in its agony assails our ears at every turn, and is borne on every breeze.

William Burke Ryan, *Infanticide: its law, prevalence, prevention and history* (London, 1862).

Typically, most murder cases hinge on the question of "Whodunit?" In the

detection of infanticide the questions begin even more fundamentally with "Was it done?" Generally speaking, infanticide is a crime conducted in secret. The investigation starts with the dead body of the baby and occupies itself by searching for clues to determine whether a crime has been committed. Even in the absence of a body, when a child has simply disappeared infanticide, charges may be lodged violating the principle of habeus corpus. But unlike other stories of murder which attempt to unmask the criminal, in the case of infanticide there is usually no question. The mother is always viewed with suspicion.

This chapter examines the fear of maternal infanticide in the nineteenth century. I am interested in how infanticide was used by doctors, lawyers and politicians to shore up their professional identities much more than I am in the actual circumstances of its occurrence. While I don't doubt that infanticide was committed and is committed with regularity, the frequency of the crime is not necessarily related to the discourse surrounding it, the kind of punishments meted out, or the methods of discovery. This chapter is to look at the rhetoric about infanticide, which perhaps, becomes more prevalent than the crime itself. In the nineteenth century, this rhetoric seemed to relate to the idealization of motherhood and a sentimental belief in the mother's essential nature. Infanticide, specifically maternal infanticide, became a topic of obsessive interest, discussed in an unprecedented manner at the same time that motherhood itself was becoming institutionalized in new ways.

i. Past Crimes: Prior to 1800

Infanticide is defined as "the wilful destruction of newborn babes through exposure, starvation, strangulation, smothering, poisoning, or through the use of some lethal weapon" (Langer 353). There have been two book-length studies on infanticide written by historians: Peter Hoffer and N. E. H. Hull's *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803* and Lionel Rose's *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain 1800-1939*. Both books make a division in the history of infanticide at 1800. This date signals a change in the frequency and punishment of the crime. I also will begin with a brief summary of infanticide in Europe, as a whole prior to 1800, and then proceed to a longer description of infanticide in nineteenth-century Britain.

Lionel Rose contends that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when the population of England burgeoned-- doubling in the period of 1801 to 1851--"we can safely assume" that infanticide was the "predominant" cause of violent infant death (8). Likewise, as the population slows its increase in the latter part of the century, infant life becomes more valuable. Rose suggests that the "value of infant life is determined by the forces of supply and demand... Dead babies were quickly replaceable when the birth rate was high (5)."[1] The historian of childhood, Lloyd de Mause, views history as consisting

---

[1] In the writings of twentieth-century historians, the division between civilization and savagery seems to be arrived at along the gap between past and present. The division

of six modes of parent-child relations beginning in infanticide and culminating in the twentieth century "helping" mode where the child is the center of the family and the focus of all attention. In enacting a drama where humanity grows to a "maturity" and learns to parent, de Mause makes the life of the species imitate the life of an individual within it. Identification of a social body with a child's body makes it difficult to distinguish not only what is truth and what fiction, but also reflects the desire of the historian for an orderly historical progression. Linda Pollock argues that children and families remain essentially unchanged throughout history. Unlike such historians of childhood as Lawrence Stone and Phillipe Aries, Pollock asserts that the nuclear family is, to a certain degree, universal. Pollock also suggests that Aries' belief that there was no such thing as childhood, in prior times arises merely because childhood then does not resemble childhood now. Even so, Pollock finds childhood in history and in the present are more alike than different and that it is merely a different means of expression that makes it appear different. John Boswell explains the high rates of abandonment as a difference "in affective bonds within the family" or "in the conceptualization of childhood (36)" rather than a complete lack of parental feeling. Boswell also reads abandonment in the place of infanticide and sees "the kindness of strangers" balancing the cruelty of the family. The history of childhood is thus written as a growth from infancy to maturity, in which the

---

between two schools of historical though, one represented by Phillipe Aries and Lloyd de Mause, who represent the earliest social construction of childhood historians, and the second by Linda Pollock and John Boswell. Historians in the Aries-de Mause camp see the experience of childhood in the past as unlike today's childhood. Aries even suggests that childhood itself is a modern invention. Historians who responded to this assertion such as Pollock and Boswell see continuity and argue that childhood and the nuclear family are rather stable throughout history.

specifics of infanticide are subsumed under the general order of a progressive growth away from baby killing. Infanticide is always posited as a beginning point, but never as an end. Prior to written history, infanticide--undocumented but always suspected--haunts the history of childhood.

Up until 1800, infanticide was thought to be the most frequently committed crime in Europe, although it often went unpunished (Rosenblum 1). In ancient Greece and Rome parents commonly exposed infants to the elements. In Rome "the father was permitted under certain circumstances to put to death children under three years of age if they had been declared monstrous by five neighbors" (Rosenblum 3). In Hellenistic Greece families usually only contained one daughter, the parents having left the others to die of exposure (Langer 353).

On the surface, Christianity seemed to make a great change in the treatment of children. After his conversion, the Emperor Constantine prohibited infanticide in 318 A. D., and by 374 A. D. child killers could expect the death penalty (Sommerville 30). Christianity's emphasis on children did not, however, much alter the behavior of the lower classes. To explain this inherent contradiction between moral stricture and everyday behavior, Maria Piers suggests that "a complex of defense mechanisms. . . protected the community. . . from feeling guilty. At the same time [infanticide] afforded them a way to get rid of unwanted children" (45n). Bede wrote in the eighth century that the woman's motive should be taken into account in the punishment of infanticide: "But it makes a great difference whether a poor woman does it on account of the difficulty in supporting the child or a harlot for the sake of concealing her wickedness" (quoted in

Kellum, 369).

Prior to 1500, church courts were concerned primarily with exacting penance for a sin which was not even considered a crime. [2] R. H. Helmholz's essay on infanticide in fifteenth century Canterbury cites one example:

> The judge ordered that Joan should dress in penitential garb and go before the procession in the parish church of Hythe on three Sundays with a wax candle of half a pound in her right hand and the knife with which she killed the boy, or a similar knife, in her left. She was also ordered to go twice around the markets of Canterbury, Faversham, and Ashford in a similar fashion. This was obviously meant as a humiliating public admission of guilt, and as a warning to others against the crime of infanticide. (383)

Secular courts did not concern themselves with infanticide and from this evidence, Helmholz suggests that "medieval men did not regard infanticide with the horror we associate with pre-meditated homicide" (387).

Foundling hospitals were opened purportedly to make abandonment of children easier. By many accounts, in the period prior to the Enlightenment infanticide occurred so frequently that it was most often overlooked unless accompanied an attack on the state or religion (Hoffer 5). Infanticide in and of itself did not constitute the threat to society that seemed to later. European courts only began to prosecute infanticide until after the middle of the sixteenth century; thus, the historian Anne Llewellyn Barstow suggests, the

---

2 See Dolan, Hanawalt for descriptions of early cases of infanticide.

murder of a child seemed less important than "affairs of men" (40).

Bernard Capp writes that in England in seventeenth-century popular literature the "crime of an unmarried servant who smothered her new-born baby" was "mundane" and not sensational enough to be considered interesting. During this time "pamphlets string together terse accounts of infants' bodies discovered in privies and ditches," but rarely discuss the details, except in such truly exceptional cases as "a mother who slaughters countless infants" or a "convicted mother who miraculously survives her execution" (Dolan, 133). Such lack of interest in run-of-the-mill infanticide suggests that the crime itself was considered unexceptional. Paradoxically, scholars of the period read the absence of infanticide in texts as evidence of the presence of infanticide in daily life. Barbara Kellum notes that there is not one incidence of infanticide in the Coroners' Rolls from 1265-1413 (373).

In the twelfth century, Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children, was known not for climbing down the chimney with sacks of toys so much as for bringing the gift of life back to murdered children (Sommerville 72).[3] Other fantasies also were about the killing of children. In some dead children rose to haunt their families, and to suck the blood of from their mothers. Superstition dictated that if a person walked over the grave of a child he contracted the disease of "grave scab" (Kellum 380).

An exception to the relatively lax restrictions on infanticide is the treatment of Jews and witches. Kellum writes of a case where nineteen Jews were put to death when a

---

[3]Sommerville's explanation for this rests upon the pervasiveness of infanticide during this time. Children wished to escape infanticide then, as children today wish for toys at Christmas.

child drowned in a cesspool next door to a home where a Jewish wedding was taking place (376). Kellum suggests that "although the Christian hatred for the Jews was of course a many-faceted phenomenon, here in their ritual-murder fantasies it seems likely that the Christians were projecting on to their enemies their own deepest latent desires" (376). Both Jews and witches were said to drink the blood of infants (Kellum 380). The historian John Sommerville speculates that the accusations of child murder against Jews and witches were inspired by memories of infanticide:

> Those who suspected everyone around them of this kind of foul play may themselves have been haunted by the memory of dead children. At least it arouses our suspicion when infanticide is the first accusation they thought to use against outsiders. (74)

In these views, the accusation of infanticide--the sight of infanticide everywhere--springs not out of real threat, but from out of a dismissed memory.

By the middle of the sixteenth century "women began to appear in court in large numbers" primarily due to the increase in prosecution for witchcraft (Barstow 41). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some historians suggest that infanticide was seen as serious only when the death of the child could be interpreted as the work of such transgressive forces as witches or blasphemers.[4] As secular courts took over the

---

[4] Lyndal Roper begins her *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Routledge, 1994) with the description of Appolonia Mayr's 1686 trial for the murder of her newborn. The Devil was figured as the midwife," writes Roper so that "Appolonia herself hardly acts (1)." In Roper's description Appolonia's subversive action are authored by a devil and it is the participation of the devil which makes the severity of Appolonia's punishment necessary. Thus both in the crime and punishment, Appolonia is merely a vessel.

treatment of infanticide, it became viewed as a murder "increasingly associated . . . with social and sexual disorder (Dolan 128)." Women, no longer considered incapable of standing trial for their actions, were punished with great severity in Europe. In the duchy of Lorraine between 1580 and 1630, the chief judge, Nicolas Remy claimed to have sent between 800 and 900 women to their deaths for witchery, and to have tortured 800 more (Barstow 65). In Luxembourg, women convicted of infanticide were buried alive while the fathers received either no punishment or a fine (Barstow 67). Even so, there was a great difference between the treatment of infanticide in Europe and in England where it was treated as a sin rather than a crime.

Gradually laws began to view all women as potential infanticides. Thus the prosecution of infanticide is intimately related to the treatment and perception of women and mothers as distinct from men. In France in 1556 the government passed a law requiring that every pregnant mother register her condition and supply a witness for the birth. If she did not comply and the infant died, she could receive the death sentence (Barstow 135). In 1624 the first law in England to prohibit infanticide was written to resemble the French precedent:

> Whereas many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid their shame and to escape punishment, do secretly bury, or conceal the death of their children, and after if the child be found dead the said women do allege that the said children were born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (although hardly it is to be proved) that the said child or children were murdered by the said women their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement: For the preventing

> therefore of this great mischief, be it enaced . . . that if any woman . . . be delivered of any issue of the body, male or female, which being born alive, should by the laws of this realm be a bastard, and that she endeavour privately either by drowning or secret burying thereof, or any other way, either by herself or come to light, whether it be born alive or not, but be concealed, in every such case, the mother so offending shall suffer death as in the case of murder except such mother can make proof by one witness at least, that the child (whose death was by her intended to be concealed) was born dead. (quoted in Wohl 197)

In a time when high infant mortality was the rule rather than the exception, this law placed an extraordinary responsibility on mothers, not only to avoid committing infanticide, but to avoid accidents, lest they be accused of infanticide. A dead infant spelled out maternal culpability.[5]

Rather than decreasing the number of infanticides, the passage of these laws may have increased them. At least, the laws increased the prosecution of infanticide whether or not they had any effect on the practice of infanticide is an entirely different question. In fact, the way this particular crime works, it seems that the more you look for it, the more you will find it. Passage of this law led to a quadrupling of infanticide cases. Instead of interpreting the increase in these cases as an indication of a dramatic increase in the crime, I will argue that it illustrates the fear of mothers arising out of a particular

---

[5]Although some saw these laws as a deviation from common law, there was a precedent in Saxon law where concealment of death was considered a crime. "it was proscribed in *morth*, the Saxon law of murder. . . To conceal or refuse to reveal the presence of a corpse was a capital offense (Hoffer and Hull, 26).

set of social conditions. Hoffer and Hull suggest that this 1624 law had roots in political flux:

> At the very same moment in English history that parliament and the crown struggled to establish their dominion in the moral universe, local communal institutions and customs, which had acted as a buffer between the individual and the power of the government, were undergoing transformation. (Hoffer and Hull, 27)

The new involvement of the courts in infanticide in the seventeenth century seemed to be related to a feeling that local and national authorities were being threatened. Hoffer and Hull connect the rate of indictment and convictions to external causes:

> Population pressures, the bleak harvest years of the 1590s, the continuing flow of poor laborers across the face of the land, and the continuing threat of further displacement of people from their small holdings, put a terrible strain on established forms of charity, wage laboring, and extending community responsibility (27).

Noting the connection between infanticide and witchcraft, Hoffer and Hull show that the two crimes increased in unison. They trace this to an atmosphere of distrust where the women on the edges of the community, "old women who demanded but did not get charity and young women who bore children out of wedlock," were the focus of distrust and anger. These two types represented "a living definition of the boundary of unacceptable deviance" (31).

After 1624, the definition of infanticide in England was altered so drastically that

the crime became as much a crime of language as a crime of body. No longer was it necessary for the child to physically emerge from the mother's body in order for it to be murdered. Now a pregnant woman who did not speak about her pregnancy and whose child subsequently died was automatically considered a murderer. In a time when miscarriage and stillbirth were frequent occurrences this put a large burden upon the mother. A mother who refused to speak of her condition by not naming her physical state was considered a criminal. The mother's silence determined her punishment should the child die. A woman's refusal to acknowledge her motherliness was proof enough of her infanticidal desire. The mother who hid the body of her stillborn baby was as liable as the mother who killed and secreted the body of a baby. Unless she could marshall evidence to prove herself innocent, the mother of a stillborn child who had not confided her pregnancy to someone (or who didn't have someone willing to say that she had), could be jailed. Even giving birth quietly without crying out in pain, could be viewed as a violation of this law (Malcolmson 195).

This harsh 1624 law remained in operation until 1803 and automatically accused the mother of infanticide in the cases of all dead babies. Perceiving the inherent injustice in this, juries often acted leniently. Instead of achieving the aim of punishing infanticide, the law actually permitted many women to escape without penalty even when they were clearly guilty. Anthony Wohl surveys the proceedings of the Old Bailey between 1730 and 1774: "Although almost all of the women who came to trial were clearly guilty of concealment, forty-six of these sixty-one Old Bailey cases were decided in favour of the defendant" (197). It was generally easy for the defendant to find one person willing to

perjure him or herself for the sake of the accused. In Chapter Three I will discuss how Sir Walter Scott made the refusal to lie about infanticide a major element in the plot of *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818).

By parading tiny knitted clothes through the courtroom, the defendant could display her true maternal nature and avoid a guilty verdict. Daniel Defoe in *Augusta Triumphans* complained of this common strategy:

> I wonder so many men of sense, as have been on the jury have been so often imposed upon by the stale pretence of a scrap or two of child-bed linen being found in the murderer's box, etc. when alas! perhaps it was ne'er put there till after the murder was committed; or if it was, but with the view of saving themselves by that devilish precaution; for so many have been acquitted on that pretence, that 'tis but too common a thing to provide child-bed linen beforehand for a poor innocent babe they are determined to murder (quoted in Malcolmson 199)

In some instances these carefully wrought vestments were later discovered to have been knitted not by the expectant mother of a longed-for baby, but borrowed from a neighbor for the duration of the trial.

ii. Victorian Infanticide

'Grandmother, Grandmother

Tell me the Truth

How many years am I

Going to Live?

One, Two, Three, Four . . ."

-Victorian Street Game (cited in Wohl 10)

By the nineteenth century the harshness of British concealment laws and the discrepancy between infanticide and all other species of murder inspired lawmakers to write a new law. Now the prosecution had to prove not only that the child had been killed, but, in addition, that the child was a human being independent of the mother. In other words, the child had to have been born before it could be murdered. The law passed in England in 1803 placed infanticide in the same category as other forms of murder. William Langer quotes the text of this law: "It must be proved that the entire body of the child has actually been born into the world in a living state" (360). The definition of humanity rested upon the qualification that the child be a reasonable creature. The vagina functioned as the boundary between reason and unreason. A baby still partway inside the mother was not considered a separate person, and as Langer gruesomely notes, the mother could club an emerging child with a hairbrush (Langer supplies the suitably feminine weapon) and be innocent of any wrong-doing (360).

By the middle of the nineteenth century infanticide seemed to have reached epidemic proportions. Even as the death rate among adults declined in the decades from 1851-1900, the infant death rate remained stable, and as, Anthony Wohl writes, even rose

in the last few years of Victoria's reign so that it comprised one-quarter of all the deaths in England (11).

Doctors wrote about the frequency of the crime. Women who worked in the factories were forced to leave their babies in the care of women dubbed "killer nurses." The practice of sending infants out to be cared for became known as "baby farming" and received outraged coverage in the popular press. The mortality rates for babies thus farmed-out was enormously high. George Moore's novel *Esther Waters* (1894) attacks baby farming and wet-nursing. Wet-nursing continued and was also blamed for the death of the wetnurse's own baby who was thus deprived of milk. Burial clubs were available to parents as insurance for babies and paid well beyond the cost of burying an infant. "Cases were reported of women who had membership for their babies in ten or more clubs, reaping a rich return at the proper time" (Langer 360). In 1846 the Friendly Societies Act abolished life insurance for any child under the age of six, but Wohl estimates that at the end of the century 80 % of children were insured (33).

Overlaying -- where an adult accidentally rolled over and suffocated a child in bed -- was also blamed for the deaths of babies. It is possible that some of these deaths were the result of what we now call Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The practice of dosing a crying infant with opium also caused deaths both deliberate and accidental. "Coroners tended to regard parental ignorance, rather than design, as the cause of infant deaths from overdoses of drugs . . ." (Wohl 35) The drugged children lost their desire to eat and starved to death.

Alongside the new burden of proof, the 1803 law provided a separate category for

concealment. No longer was concealment the equivalent of murder. Now juries unwilling to send a woman to her death for infanticide could send her to jail for up to two years. The woman's refusal to make her condition public was a crime, and she had no right to privacy. Though strict laws governing infanticide remained operative, by mid-century the actions of courts were more liberal than the law. Juries of the period tended to be generally sympathetic to the unmarried woman's plight and much more willing to return a concealment verdict than the death penalty, especially if the mother demonstrated some feeling of remorse for her crime. Still, despite the written laws, the courts often refused to blame the mothers. Of the twenty-two infanticide trials of mothers in the Oxford Assize Circuit between 1832 and 1837, twenty resulted in acquittal.

Excuses for infanticide were sought by courts to justify not sentencing women. Jurors rested their decisions upon the idea that the natural instinct of mothers-- itself an unreasoning attachment--could be undermined by the exigencies of her situation. Seeing social issues as the general cause of infanticide, juries tended not to focus blame on the individual mother. In this view infanticide could be placed into a broader frame as part of a degeneration brought about by the growth of industrialism. The "monopolizing of the male sex of all the more lucrative branches of employment" (Rose 17), the crisis of spinsterhood in mid-century, the discrepancy in pay which meant that even if a woman could find employment she could hope to earn only half of a man's wage, and the sexual double standard, also provided reasonable excuses. The seemingly liberal motive which could permit a jury to see a woman as a victim of her social situation also permitted courts to ignore the concept of maternal agency. Infanticide was not the act of an

individual mother directed at a particular child but evidence of a breakdown of the larger system and a generalized societal decay.

Malthusian doctrine operated in the opposite direction from merciful liberalism to suggest that a high infant mortality rate as a necessary thinning of the population. Malthus's argument for maternal responsibility, which motivated the New Poor Law of 1834, worked from the assumption that a woman's illegitimate offspring should be her responsibility alone. This law, which Mary Poovey identifies as an example of "disciplinary individualism," sought to eliminate the need to make judgments about which individuals were deserving and which the were the "undeserving poor" (106). Previously, the costs of raising illegitimate children had been shared by the parish and the supposed father. Bastardy laws, according to Malthusian enthusiasts, purportedly encouraged promiscuity by guaranteeing women some support should they give birth. The apparatus put in place by this law was designed to make the problems of poverty disappear naturally through a rational, market-driven process. Under this reasoning, women who could not get economic assistance for their illegitimate offspring would rationally decide not to have babies.

Some critics of The Poor Law reasonably suggested that removing support for babies would cause more infanticide, but Inspector Walcott of Wales argued the contrary. The adoption of The Poor Law, claimed Walcott, made paternity more difficult to establish, and in denying child support to the mother, would actually decrease the incidence of infanticide. In Walcott's logic infanticide rates would fall,

> . . . not only from there being fewer cases to give rise to them, but because the

> man who in most instances is now the first to suggest these crimes, especially that of abortion, and to assist in their execution, would no longer have an interest in doing so, and the female, left to herself, from maternal feelings and natural timidity, would seldom attempt the destruction of her own offspring. (Rose 25)

Walcott's argument in favor of The Poor Law rested on the assumption of the "natural timidity" and "maternal feelings" of women. In his logic, men encourage women to commit the crime because of their own natural desires to avoid paying for their progeny. If men were not held accountable, they would be less likely to have an interest in encouraging infanticide.

Despite this rhetoric, the sense of increasing infanticide pervaded England after the passage of the 1834 Poor Law. The London *Times* suggests that the city of London acted as a dumping grounds for the bodies of infants, its architecture serving as a mausoleum for infant corpses. In 1861, two hundred and sixty-eight babies were found "dead in the Thames or the canals or ponds about London...under railway arches, on doorsteps, in dustholes, cellars and the like," (quoted in Rose 38). So virulently was the scourge of infanticide depicted in the popular press, that in 1866 the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment "recommended that a new non-capital offence of infanticide be created to cover the killing of a child by its mother during birth or within seven days afterward" (77). Under this proposal, the psychological condition of the mother could be balanced against the punishment for infanticide. A sort of sliding scale of punishment would allow courts to decide the degree of guilt for the mother and assign a suitable punishment.

Despite the frenzied eloquence of politicians and reformers infanticide actually declined significantly in the nineteenth-century according to Ann Higginbotham. Higginbotham attributes the active discursive life of infanticide to the medical and legal professions' desire to establish themselves as authorities not only on infancy, but on almost all matters of significance. Higginbotham suggests that "the relationship between illegitimacy and infanticide was more complex than Victorians assumed" (336). Instead of confronting the "real problems of illegitimacy" the "emphasis on infanticide" provided explanations of high levels of infant mortality and made the actions of individual mothers seem more important than pervasive social problems (337). Higginbotham argues that although doctors understood that poor nutrition and inadequate care were the main causes of death in illegitimate children "this understanding was lost amid the growing panic over murderous mothers" (337).

In 1862, the heated battle concerning who should control the coroner's office of Middlesex revolved around questions of infanticide. William Burke Ryan's tract on infanticide published in this same year and the speeches of the coroner-to-be, Edwin Lankester, both draw upon a rhetoric of dead infants. The writings of these two doctors demonstrate the means by which the medical profession attempted to build a reputation for professional expertise. In the battle for the coroner's office, an office which previously had demanded no particular knowledge or skills, the issue nominally was over the qualifications of those examining the bodies of dead infants. Doctors and lawyers struggled to define their professions and to attain the right to establish which discipline had greater ability to judge how an infant had died. Each wished to make the distinction

between stillbirth and murder hard and fast and to guarantee that his own profession had the sole means to make that distinction. Ryan and Lankester suggested that infanticide was "grossly underreported" (Berry 134). Only the scientific expertise of a doctor could determine the true cause of death.

William Ryan, like Lankester, used a tropology of hiddenness to discuss infanticide:

> The sight is horrified as, day after day, the melancholy catalogue of murders meets the view, and we try to turn away our gaze in hope of some momentary relief. But turn where we may, still we are met by the evidence of a wide spread crime. In the quiet of the bedroom we raise the box-lid, and the skeletons are there. In the calm evening walk we see in the distance the suspicious-looking bundle, and the mangled infant is within. By the canal side, or in the water, we find the dead child. In the solitude of the wood we are horrified by the ghastly sight; and if we betake ourselves to the rapid rail in order to escape the pollution, we find at journey's end that the mouldering remains of a murdered innocent have been our travelling companion; and that the odour from that unsuspected parcel truly indicates what may be found within. (45-46)

Infanticide represented an omnipresent, yet insidious, threat. Ryan's tract, written for an audience of physicians to shore up his scientific credentials, is anything but scientific. Infanticide lurks like the spectral figure in a gothic novel, as something that is there and, at the same time, not there. Despite what is unknown -- the mother doesn't know what to do, the traveller doesn't know what is inside the parcel -- even in the absence of all proof -

- there seems to be no doubt as to what is hidden. All bundles contain babies, skeletons are in every bedroom and the "melancholy catalogue" of infant murder that "meets the view" is not a catalogue in the sense of an enumeration of what exists so much as a listing of what doesn't. Nor does the display of bodies ever become visible; never do the corpses actually meet the eyes of the observer. Performing a function opposed to that normally associated with a catalogue--the species of representation designed to showcase the product or to organize--Ryan's tract on infanticide turns the secretive nature of infanticide, the difficulty of reliably cataloguing the crime, into evidence of its omnipresence. What we don't know, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt.

At the same time as Ryan's appeal rests upon less than scientific data, statistics seem to support him. Statistical evidence suggested a rise in infanticide as the number of inquests increased. As the instruments of police surveillance grew more efficient (or seemingly so) with the institution of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829 and of the county constabularies in 1856, so the reports of infanticide also grew. Vigilant coroners such as Dr. Thomas Wakley, who served for West Middlesex from 1839 to 1861 and his successor, Lankester built their careers on infanticide. In West Middlesex infanticide seemed to occur with frightening regularity during the tenure of these two coroners as they "fought to define the position as strictly a medical one" (Berry 134). The Middlesex coroner's office held symbolic meaning as the birthplace for a nascent professionalism for doctors, a development that Laura Berry notes in her essay on *Adam Bede,* was followed with great interest by the entire medical field ( ). The lack of reliable statistics even after the 1874 Registration Act which made registration of birth compulsory, makes it

impossible to estimate accurately, not only the rate of illegitimate birth, but even more so the rate of infanticide. Rose argues that the illegitimate birth rate, estimated by the government at 44,000 a year, was more likely around 65,000. As there are no national statistics on illegitimate death rates, Rose is forced to draw upon local estimates which "indicate a frightful holocaust" (23): the disappearance of some twenty-thousand infants. The authors of such estimates are often physicians--such as Dr. Bachnoffner, Superintendent Registrar for Marylebone, and Dr. John Brendon Curgenven whose reports to the Select Committee on Infant Life Protection in 1871 indicated that 70 percent of children in a given workhouse died. "Doctors represent themselves as detectives; their political mission, to be awarded official status as coroner, is informed in their new view by a moral imperative: to seek out and report the truth" (Berry 137).

The accusations of infanticide themselves constitute a mode of story-telling as doctors and lawyers attempt to construct the narrative of maternal infanticide out of the clues available to them. Evidence that infanticide occurred can also be read as evidence of the terror that infanticide inspired rather than its actuality. Any construction of an infanticide narrative can be read also as the story of this obsessive fear.

iii. Mothers on Trial

Although there were other methods available which arguably could have saved more infant lives, the discourse surrounding infanticide seemed to serve other purposes.[6] The shift from a law that condemns all mothers to one separating infanticide into two different crimes--one that is the act of murder and one that is the act of concealment--seems related to a new discourse of motherhood. The child was viewed as completely at the mercy of a mother whose primary role was to mold the future citizen and thereby assure the stability of the nation-state. The child became valued as an individual who was part of the private life of the family as well as a potential part of the citizenry. The mother's value rested on her ability to make her child into a good citizen. The idealization of the family and domesticity as separate from politics and the marketplace also gave priority to the public sphere, making the feminine privacy of the home the preparation for the masculine public life outside of it. The doubleness of the rhetoric around motherhood at this time suggests an ambivalence and fear of the mother. Thus, as the Reverend John W. Burgon put it in 1871, "woman's strength is her weakness" (quoted in Gay 296). Peter Gay goes on to suggest that the woman "rules, or rather, reigns, because she has vowed to obey" (296).

Even as depicted as the sole guardians of childish virtue and the future of the state, the majority of mothers had no way to actually perform the tasks which defined

---

[6] As Higginbotham argues the prosecution of infanticide provided a means policing women: "Throughout the nineteenth century, infant deaths for more readily tolerated than easy virtue"(337).

them. As E. Ann Kaplan writes: "An array of so-called authorities--priests and clergymen, doctors, philosophers, professors, writers, journalists, and others--all largely male--were constantly proclaiming about mothering in the nineteenth century. . . " (21). Nancy Armstrong has suggested that novels and conduct books gave women greater power and actually created a new idea of domesticity.[7] A body of literature delineates the correct procedures for the middle class mother and makes such behavior seem universal.

Yet despite the emphasis on the domestic and familial, in the 1830s, children accounted for half the labor force in the British cotton mills. The gap between the depiction of motherhood and childhood and the realities of daily life added to the tension: "Children became an obsessive theme in Victorian culture at the same time that they were being exploited as never before" (Sommerville, 167). [8] Likewise mothers who worked in factories, or as wet nurses, or maids, or prostitutes, found themselves in an impossible position. "For women the separation of work and home and the new disciplines of the factory made their diverse activities less easy to combine. The factories created special problems for nursing mothers . . . Engels describes the women rushing home in the factory break to feed their babies" (Rowbotham 57).

The interest in infanticide in the writings of doctors, lawyers, and novelists in the

---

[7]One of the most powerful arenas for dictating the behavior of mothers was that of breast-feeding. Valerie Fildes' *Breasts, Bottles, and Babies* discusses this phenomenon in great detail. Ruth Perry's article, "Colonizing the Breast" connects the breast with colonizing efforts.

[8] See John Boswell, The Kindness of Strangers; , W. Langer, "Infanticide: A Historical Survey." Boswell also notes how the conflation of abandonment with infanticide inflated the numbers of infanticide victims. The two are not necessarily the same, as the institutionalization of such things as baby depositories in Italian churches makes clear.

mid-nineteenth century seems more a product of the desire to establish their identities than a result of an actual increase in baby-killing. The flurry of writing about infanticide could indicate not that more mothers were guilty of killing their children, but instead that there was less child murder than in the past. The relation of the crime to the writing about the crime is an inverse one, and the more infanticide finds its way into texts, the less it is happening outside of them.

After 1800 infanticide gained a new life in discourse and became a focus of widespread attention. I want to suggest that the new interest in infanticide came about due to the rise of a new idea about the power of mothering. The concern about infanticide in writing does not relate to an increase in infanticide in daily life so much as the desire to deny all maternal ambivalence. Even the middle class woman enacted a contradiction, as her own position depended upon the labor of the working- class women who allowed her the pampered and indulged appearance of fragility. The middle-class woman's leisurely existence masked the labor of the working-class woman. Ann McClintock describes and interprets a cartoon by Sir John Tenniel which appeared in *Punch* in 1863:

> Instead of a unified female self, the mirror reflects back the doubled image of Victorian womanhood: above a cascade of lacy flounced skirt (the metonym for decorative idleness) the female body divided into two, a white elbow (a sign of the absence of work) and a disheveled working class torso, half-dead from exhaustion. The mirror frames a female hydra, a Siamese twin fully expressive of the contradictory and fatal reciprocity of identity of working-class and upper-class

women. (98)

What appears as a natural and ahistorical condition of mothering actually depends upon very specific historic class-bound conditions. McClintock argues that the supposed universality of the family founded on female labor and "vaunted as lying beyond politics and hence beyond social change" arose at "the moment that Victorian middle-class women began to challenge the boundaries between private and public, waged work and unwaged work" (93).

Middle-class and upper-class women were limited by their pregnancies-- their "confinements." The paradoxically virginal motherhood came to express all that was pure and angelic as her physical and sexual aspects were denied. As Ruth Perry has argued where "Historically women had been perceived as lascivious and lustful creatures, fallen daughters of Eve, corrupting and corrupted," they now became creatures perceived to be of "another order of being: loving but without sexual need, morally pure, disinterested, benevolent, and self-sacrificing" (116). Perry's argument that the maternal and erotic fields were separated clearly by the end of the eighteenth century, suggests that the breast remained a site of their mutuality. Something as physical as breast-feeding was perceived as a way of instilling virtue and morality in the child rather than a simple matter of nutrition.

Rousseau suggested that the mother`s role as nurturer was natural, but Mary Jacobus notes that even while positioning the mother as the guardian of nature, Rousseau cannot ignore her desire to escape her new "natural" place: "Women have stopped being mothers; they will no longer be; they no longer want to be. If they should want to be, they

hardly could be" (Jacobus 242). But, the ideal of motherhood tells another story. Rousseau felt that women left to follow their desires would never voluntarily become mothers. On the one hand the child should be left alone, on the other, if left to her own devices the mother would not perform her seemingly "natural" duty.

A mother who killed her child could do so and get away with it only if she made emotion the cause of her crime. In this way she could make the unmotherly act of infanticide into the behavior of an irrational female. If not understandable as the act of a sane woman it could be comprehended as coming out of insanity. A woman could kill her own child almost acceptably if her act was figured as an irrational overswelling of emotion. The spectacle of the penitent mother on trial served the purpose of allaying fears that the nineteenth-century mother--now endowed with new powers and responsibilities in the new social order--could literally get away with murder. The confession of regret and powerlessness would save the mother from the hangman. By rendering herself powerless in one sphere of society--that of reason and sense--the mother could escape punishment for exercising undue power within her given sphere, the home.

The movement from a crime related to the body of the woman to one related to her appearance and demeanor parallels a movement in the punishment of all crimes. Martin Wiener writes:

> The decades after 1820 saw a heightened concern with unregulated human power, both personal and collective. . . . Criminal and penal policy articulated the effort to counter this perception by fostering disciplined behavior and a broad ethos of respectability (11)

Emphasis shifted from a specific bodily locus to discourse, manifesting itself in the idea of confession and redemption. Michel Foucault describes how such tortures as drawing and quartering gave way to incarceration and rehabilitation. Similarly, Wiener traces a change in punishment so that the criminal in the nineteenth century was viewed in terms of a complex of behaviors rather than in terms of one action. Thus such things as illegitimacy, profligacy and sexual permissiveness could be seen as part of a scheme of criminal behavior while not in and of themselves being prosecuted. Wiener quotes the Prison Discipline Society in 1818, which claimed not to seek to end the criminal acts so much as the "habits and inclinations" of the criminals (46). By the beginning of the nineteenth century the laws that punished a woman for concealment were considered overly harsh and unjust. Infanticide was connected to sexual activity outside of marriage, so it was usually prosecuted if only if committed (or seemingly committed) by an unmarried woman.

iv. The Line Between the Civilized and the Savage

> Infanticide is practised as extensively and legally in England as it is on the banks of the Ganges; a circumstance which apparently has not yet engaged the attention of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.
>
> Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* (1845)

The impossibility of avoiding the tiny bodies in every conceivable spot serves as evidence of the limits of progress and reform. Disraeli's geographic confluence of the Thames and the Ganges employs the rhetoric of infanticide as the line between the civilized and the savage, but makes that division only in words, not in actions: the English are as apt to commit infanticide as the foreigners they seek to civilize. For Disraeli, the actuality of infanticide fails as the distinguishing mark of the barbarian. In both India and England the act is equally condoned and practiced, and Disraeli suggests that the presence of the "Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" overlooks the savagery in its own backyard. Disraeli's civilized state is more rhetoric than reality, and can be seen in the propagation of missionary groups and their desire to eradicate infanticide in foreign lands.

The professionalization of doctors and lawyers marks yet an attempt to make the distinction between civilization and savagery in another way. Forensic manuals illustrated the methodology of dissecting the newborn corpse. The doctor must stand apart from the "clamor" and render a judgment on what has taken place. Infanticide

perhaps more than any other single event presents the difficulty of calm amidst the fraught and dramatic evidence. This moment of deciphering the narrative from out of the infant's body is the moment when the identity of the professional, doctor or lawyer, becomes most apparent. William Hutchinson's *Dissertation on Infanticide, in its relations to Physiology and Jurisprudence* (1820) suggest as much: "There is no occasion where the Medical Practitioner should feel more deeply sensible of the importance and difficulty of the functions imposed on him, than when he is required, by legal authority, to form a judgement on the nature and cause of death in a case of supposed infanticide"(5). Even so, as the professional distinguishes himself from those around him by his calm "amidst the trouble and agitation." He is deaf to "popular clamor and vague reasonings and conjectures which the vulgar are always readily disposed to intrude on his attention" (5).

The desire for systematicity and order which characterize the new professionalism can also be seen in the belief in evolution. The growing acceptance of the knowledge of the Darwinian family of mankind linked the so-called primitives with the Victorians. The mother in the past, like the primitive mother, was infanticidal. Felicity Nussbaum traces a connection between infanticide, savagery, and history beginning in the eighteenth century:

> Savages of past and present are collapsed into each other, the savage of the past remaining in a timeless zone. The eighteenth-century Englishwoman climbs on the back of the savage woman to her pedestal. In short, the eighteenth

> century marks the formation of an English and civilized notion of motherhood that is contrasted with a savage motherhood capable of infanticide and cannibalism yet at the same time described as "natural." The paradox of the noble savage is reconciled in the body of the mother, idealized yet colonized. (53)

According to Nussbaum, infanticide begins to be viewed as something that exists outside of history. The description of infanticide in other cultures allows the European mother to make herself appear civilized. Doctors employed infanticide to shore up his own professional status. Civilized mothers use it to assure themselves of their identities as well. Motherhood reflects both the savage and the civilized, and the natural mother is represented as both nurturing and infanticidal.

No matter how idealized, motherhood incorporates in its rhetoric an underlying barbarism. Rose suggests that the "complacency" of the British population, which allowed Britons in the first part of the eighteenth century to believe that infanticide in England was uncommon, represents a displacement of the crime from local mothers to barbarians. At the same time, this rhetoric situates the primeval mother as infanticidal. Even as the British began to believe that infanticide was becoming more prevalent within the bounds of their own nation, they called upon comparisons to make the point that such was unacceptable behavior for English people. An analogy drawn by the London *Times* in 1847 suggests that infanticidal acts are the function of racial backwardness: "It has ceased to be murder in England. It is beginning to be thought as

little of as braining a process-server or shooting an in-coming tenant, in Ireland" (cited in Rose, 29). As Ann McClintock suggests the Irish were not considered the same race as the British and were usually assigned Negroid features in cartoons. Similarly the lower classes were seen to be a separate race. If the writing of the nineteenth century places infanticide as the boundary between peoples existing in the same world, the line between these people--Europeans and their others, as McClintock has noted--is one where past and present exist in the same geographic space (30). According to McClintock the "recurrent feature of colonial discourse" is this figuring of land as empty and the displacement of its people onto an *"anachronistic space"* (30). The trope which McClintock sees as placing colonized people outside of history in "a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire" enacts a collapse of time and space. The savages represent a past that has been outgrown by civilized peoples. According to this trope, claims McClintock: "colonized people--like women and the working class in the metropolis--do not inhabit history proper but exist" as permanently "atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency" (30).

Darwinism had made racial "backwardness" analogous to chronological backwardness, something to be outgrown, evolved away from. The Briton was able to believe that not only was infanticide an action of a previous age--and of the human relics in uncivilized lands--but also its lack functioned as proof of evolution. If infanticide did appear among his countrymen and women, it did not undermine his belief in his racial superiority so much as suggest that this superiority was in danger.

In the Darwinian schema, the primitive ancestors existing on other continents present evidence of our own progression. In this manner the infanticidal acts of racial others represent something that the civilized nations have transcended. The suggestion lingers however that foremothers--connected genealogically--were infanticidal. The fear that infanticide is on the increase and that it has not been completely left behind represents a fear that history's progression has ceased or reversed.[9]

Infanticide in its very nature presents a problem in story-telling. In the nineteenth-century, infanticide appeared as an aberration even as it appeared constantly. In the writings of historians in the late twentieth-century there is a sense of relief that today's children are safe from the threat, that modern childhood is free from such depravity. Infanticide provides the distinguishing mark of the civilized, not only in the rhetoric of the nineteenth-century reformers, but also in the work of historians of the present day. Infanticide functions then and now as a sign of divisions between peoples and renders the telling an unbiased story even more difficult. The work of twentieth-century historians continues the same pattern. The gulf between "us" and "them" does not rest as clearly along the divides of race and class or nationality. The temporal distinction performs the same function of dividing humanity into two groups: infanticidal and non-infanticidal. Infanticide requires a distancing, a fearful standing

---

[9] As Daniel Pick writes women were naturally seen as backward in comparison to men. Thus degeneration as a concept is intimately related to their position in society, both as active agents of "disorder" and as passive victims of it (92) (*Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918*, Cambridge, 1989)

apart. Hardly ever described in the simple past tense in novels or directly re-told, the infanticide story holds a horror that makes it difficult to face. In the history of childhood, infanticide functions as a primary, but unspeakable story.

Chapter Two

"Two Feet Long and Three Feet Wide": The Landscape of Infanticide

> I had two objects to attain; first, to represent a picture which should not be unimpressive yet consistent with the character that should describe it, secondly, while I adhered to the style in which such persons describe, to take care that words, which in their minds are *impregnated* with passion, should likewise convey passion to Readers who are not accustomed to sympathize with men feeling in that manner or using such language.
>
> William Wordsworth, "Note to 'The Thorn'" 140) [emphasis mine]

As Thomas Richards and Marie Helene Huet have noted, the idea of the "monstrous" as some external evil disappears at the end of the eighteenth century, to be replaced by an understanding of deviance as internal and containable. The witch transforms into a new dangerous woman--a mother whose power emanates from within her position in the family. Where in the past the monster came from outside of the known, now, as all types of life are categorized, monsters become mutants, disruptions from within the family tree. Following the logic of Richards and Huet, it makes sense to suggest that the witch moved from the outside of society into its very core, becoming the infanticidal mother. The infanticidal mother is, of course, not a separable category, since midwives were suspected of being both bewitched and

infanticidal, and witches were purported to make "witches salve" out of the bodies of infants (Bewell 376).

As cultural practice and as literature, infanticide is the fugitive and mesmerizing plot which haunts the narrative of the nineteenth-century family. Typically representations of infanticide from the seventeenth century onward emphasize landscape: "Seeking to hide pregnancy as well as delivery and murder, perpetrators...had to get their victims' bodies out of the house.... Hence, popular representations emphasize the outside, the space for burying and abandoning" (Dolan 158). The landscape of the out of doors becomes the burial ground. In this plot the mother-to-be refuses the house and its domestic plotlessness and goes outside to destroy her child.

In the traditional ballads "The Cruel Mother" and "Mary Hamilton," the mother kills her infant children, and in "Prince Robert" a mother kills an older child.[1] In these early ballads of infanticide the children return and speak to the mother, berating her for her actions. In some versions of "The Cruel Mother," the mother becomes a briar or thorn tree in punishment for her crime, while in others the narrative begins with her sitting beside the thorn. While something that previously never had a language, a newborn child, enters into speech, something that had language, the mother, is silenced. The ballad, which is supposed to have no speaker and to rely upon the absence of the individual, speaks for children at the expense of mothers. The

---

[1] "Mary Hamilton" contains the inspiration for Virginia Woolf's reference to Mary' in *A Room of One's Own.*

> Last nicht there were four Maries,
> The nicht there'll be but three;
> There was Marie Seton, and Marie Beton,
> And Marie Carmichael, and me.' (Child A)

nature of the ballad and its recovery through history seem linked to a desire to return to a past where simple people lived simpler lives and where *originality* was never questioned. By tracing a trajectory of the ballad in British literature I want to look at Wordsworth's motives in employing the ballad form.

Many of William Wordsworth's contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) concern mothers, both mad and bad, inside in a particular rural environment that serves as an envelope for them and their stories. In "The Thorn," in particular, Wordsworth uses the ballad form to conjure from the landscape the story of a man telling the story of a mother. The link forged between the mother and nature allows Wordsworth to coax from landscape a plot that expresses an anxious relation to maternal subjectivity.

In this chapter I will read Wordsworth's "The Thorn" in three ways. First I will read the plot of the poem as it proceeds on two levels. Most obviously the story is that of maternal infanticide uncertainly narrated; but it is also the story of how the natural landscape, working on the mind of a sea captain, inspires the plot of maternal infanticide. I will consider how the distinction between the *histoire* and *recit*, the narrative and the story the narrative reveals, collapses so that the telling and the plot become one story.[2] Secondly, I will examine the form that the poems takes. What conventions does the ballad inspire and how does Wordsworth both thwart and encourage the desires of his readership? The use of the ballad form implies a meaning

---

[2] Peter Brooks in *Reading for Plot* distinguishes the two and uses the Russian formalist terms where *fabula* (*Histoire*) is the "order of events referred to by the narrative" and *sjuzet* (*recit*) which refers to "the order of events presented in the narrative discourse" (12).

beyond the plot contained within it. Thirdly, I want to link both the form and the content of this poem to the history of maternal infanticide. I will be moving outward from a close reading centered on the text of the poem to an attempt to account for the ideology surrounding the poem. I will suggest that the use of the ballad as literary form and the representation of the mother as murderess operate simultaneously along parallel lines.

ii. A Melancholy Crop: "The Thorn"

"The Thorn" in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) translates the plot of infanticide from the supernatural into the natural and domestic. William Wordsworth's poetic infanticide plot prefigures the way in which British literary novelists of the nineteenth century will present their infanticide plots in such novels as George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and Sir Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818). These representations of infanticide occur in tandem with changes in the ideology of motherhood and shifts in the literary market. The relation between the plots of monstrous criminality and domestic virtue illuminates how the discourse of maternal infanticide and poetic self-fashioning coincide.

"The Thorn" relates the story of an aged sea captain described by Wordsworth in his note to the poem as same one "who relates to us what he does not know." The sea captain's narrative is continually pushed along and halted by his own denials of the information he has just relayed. Walking us along towards the thorn, the sea captain situates it, without locating himself until the seventh stanza. He appears to be merely the teller, the vessel for a substance, in the same way that Wordsworth, the minstrel, is

merely passing along a truth. But in the "Note" Wordsworth asserts that the poem is about its speaker, the captain, and not "about" Martha Ray, the forsaken woman who may or may not have given birth to and murdered her own child.

In this way the poem manages to be about and not about a mother at the same time. Using the figure of the mother to define the boundaries of otherness, the poet desires to make a return to her at the same time as he fears being absorbed by her. The mother is always fugitive and yet always the central issue in the poem. It is she who inspires the poem but it is her story that can never be verified.

The sea captain cannot prove that Martha Ray exists except by relating his subjective interpretation. All the evidence that the sea captain marshals only serves as evidence of the limitation of empiricism itself. Despite his nearly obsessive desire for proof and his wish to give voice to the story's absent plot, the sea captain in the long run finds himself guided only by superstition and hearsay. His narration displaces the presence of the mother as the source of the story. Rather than admit the mother's power, he would rather conclude that there is no narrative that is separate from interpretation.

The desire to anchor interpretation in objective experience is suggested in the poem's opening description of the thorn. "There is a thorn; it looks so old,/In truth you'd find it hard to say,/How it could ever have been young." Immediately a gap yawns between the subjective--what "you", the reader, can or cannot say and the reality of what *we* know: that the thorn as a part of the natural world must have at some point been young. Certainly the word "young" is reserved for people rather than plants and trees. By describing the thorn as "Not higher than a two-years' child" and seeing the lichens that have overgrown it as "A melancholy crop," the speaker narrows

the distance between his perception and the actuality of the thorn and between the thorn's existence as distinct from the story that is to be told.

"In truth you'd find it hard to say" sets the oppositions between truth and falsehood, age and youth, and the difficulty of speech versus the actuality of being, into place before we have read three lines into the poem. Although Wordsworth admits readily that the sea captain speaker cannot perceive the thorn--or maybe cannot even speak of the thorn--without relating it to another narrative, the link between the story of an abandoned woman's progression into insanity and possible child murder and the sea captain's sight of the thorn remains unarticulated. As with spontaneous generation, the sea captain relates a story he has imagined, created out of nothing. Or not quite nothing--out of landscape and the referential network of thorn mythology and perhaps out of his own history--the lichens overgrowing

> ... clasp round
> so close, you'd say they were bent
> With plain and manifest intent,
> To drag it to the ground;
> And all had joined in one endeavour
> To bury this poor thorn for ever.

The ground shifts so that you, the reader, rather than the sea captain attribute "intent" to lichens that have together determined to bury the thorn. A story spontaneously generates as the thorn itself seems subject to entropic decay. This disavowal of agency proceeds under the aegis of actual processes as nature and science conspire. Or perhaps this movement is more like the decay of corpses where earth and corpse become finally indistinguishable. The destruction of the natural world becomes

infused with the intent to destroy one of its parts, the thorn.[3]

By 1798 the landscape is so infused with the history of buried children that the mere mention of a thorn bush implies infanticide. Mary Jacobus states in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads of 1798"*: "The commonest of all literary associations for a thorn tree was illegitimate birth and child-murder" (241). The idea for killing the child seems to pre-exist the text itself, coming into the mother's head from outside just as the plot of infanticide comes into the sailor's mind via the thorn. This is a structure that will recur in infanticide texts throughout the nineteenth century, mirroring the way in which the infanticidal text arises out of the emerging discourse of ideal motherhood.

In "The Thorn" the natural landscape excites passion in the mind of the speaker whose words are *impregnated* and in turn impregnate the minds of readers. The relentless movement of passion in the poem is like that of a contagion or possession shifting from body to body, site to site. Once excited in the mind of the sea captain, it will not disappear. Through the plot of the infanticidal mother, Wordsworth relates the natural world to himself and his speaker and then threads the mother's plot emotionally into poetry. The story of maternal infanticide serves as the mediator between man and nature, and "in her mediatory role she [the mother] becomes delimited (arrested) by nature so that *man* can attempt to achieve *human* fulfillment"

---

[3] Situating the thorn next to a pond, just as the popular German ballad author, Burger, in his own infanticide ballad had situated a gibbet beside a pond, Wordsworth moves his infanticide poem into a different literary mode. Rather than making the tale of sensation the result of his writing, he makes it the subject and thus allows himself to incorporate aspects of Burger's work which he also disdains.

(Ross 392).

Wordsworth's narrator engages us in his passage through landscape, distracting us from the actual agents in the story and leading us into the scene so that the reader and the sea captain together become spectators together:[4]

> This thorn you on your left espy;
>
> And to the left, three yards beyond,
>
> You see a little muddy pond
>
> Of water, never dry;
>
> I've measured it from side to side:
>
> 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.

The speaker clings on the one hand to the possibility of an empty form, the possibility of a measure. The grave can be rendered to us thus through a description of equivalents. Our vision coincides with his; yet at the same time the words can never live up to their promise. A pond is by definition "never dry" and the units of measure that he obsesses upon throughout--the height of the thorn, the size of the grave--are equivalences that attempt, like the use of metaphor itself, to evoke in the reader the experience of seeing the thorn bush. And like metaphor, the attempt at equivalence always depends upon the failure of likeness as much as upon the success of similarity. Despite all of the sea captain's attempts at an empirical analysis of natural processes--reading the narrative in the landscape as a scientist does--he falls prey to the fact that he has no real evidence. All is based upon his eye and his method of discernment, so

---

[4] Paul D. Sheats suggests that the speaker measures the thorn to "determine whether an infant could be hanged on it" (198).

that when he transforms the moss into a "mossy network" he also imagines "the hand of a lady fair/The work had woven been." The feminine act of creation prefigures the later description of the other female action of procreation coupled with destruction. Yet the woman in the poem has virtually no existence at all.

As the garrulous captain links the scarlet of the moss with the scarlet of a woman's cape, he says that the "heap of earth" close to the thorn--

Is like an infant's grave in size
As like as like can be:
But never, never any where,
An infant's grave was half so fair.

The heap of earth becomes thus transformed by the power of the sea captain's imagination into a grave but only through "likeness." At the same time as likeness creates a grave out of a measured plot, the similarity is undermined by the fact that the grave is also not like a grave, because the grave of a infant could never be "half so fair." The slippage between existence and non-existence is complicated again by the use of equivalence and measurement. Likeness and unlikeness become too inextricably linked for us to distinguish between what is and isn't itself. Experience tells us this could not be an infant's grave because aesthetically it cannot be so--it is too beautiful. The outline--its measure, three by two--indicates, however, that it *must* be a grave. The tension between the container and the contained seems to rest upon the paradox that the horrific could also be artistically appealing. It is this paradox that provides Wordsworth with the center for *Lyrical Ballads* where the outline, the ballad, and his aesthetic collide and converge.

The woman introduced in the next stanza who seems to cry out "oh misery"

and who, we are told, often sits near the configuration which resembles an infant's grave is described as "wretched" and known "to every star,/And every wind that blows." The sailor must read into nature to find his narrative but the woman is known by nature for what she is. The woman is removed from nature, because it is nature that evokes her. As the latent content of the dream of nature, she must be translated by the speaker into narrative. What makes the poem assimilate and dispel the knowledge of creativity posits the female as a text to be written rather than a creative force in her own right. As part of the landscape and yet removed from it she inspires the questions. Remember that even ten stanzas into the poem the woman herself has only be referred to obliquely, conjured out of the natural configurations, but never actually present. And the questions she inspires which seem to belong to us can never be definitively answered. They appear within quotation marks, implying they emanate from an interlocutor, not introduced directly, but imagined. These questions are: Why does she go to the mountain? Why does she sit beside the thorn? Wherefore does she cry and why does she repeat her cry?

After relating these questions within his narrative, the speaker answers that he does not know, but wishes that he did. In order to know more we must go to the spot, but we must not go if she is there:

> And if you see her in her hut,
>
> Then to the spot away!--
>
> I never heard of such as dare
>
> Approach the spot when she is there.

The poem reaches outside itself for verification, but turns to the geography of landscape for verification not the woman. In order to understand the story, we must

attend to "the spot" but not the woman. Any attempt at understanding will be circumscribed by lack of courage; and the sailor has "never heard of such that dare" and so has no notion that we, his listeners, will be different--more discerning or less fearful--than any one else. As the possibility of the reader's inability to make clear judgements is broached it is immediately squelched by the inevitability of our cowardice in the face of superstition. Cowardice on the part of the reader ensures his refusal to approach the scene, and his desire to turn away: the sea captain has never heard (and typically he depends on hearsay even for this supposition) of "such as dare" "approach" the woman herself. Avoiding the woman, but interpreting the space she inhabits, leads to the infanticide story.

As the sea captain continually insists that he will reveal in words all he knows but that the desirer of more must go to the spot in order to "trace" the tale, we are given the skeletal figure of the case: Martha Ray was betrothed to Stephen Hill, but he with "another maid to church/Unthinking...went--." The diction is such that we can read the action as unthought of, or read Stephen as congenitally "unthinking." Stephen, being male, is capable of begetting and not thinking. Martha also does not think; her body "thinks" the baby for her. Stephen, unlike the speaker who thinks and feels too much, perhaps refuses Martha because he doesn't think. It is thought rather than feeling that he lacks. Martha reacts physically to his betrayal and loses the capacity for reason and so becomes thoughtless too:

> A cruel, cruel fire, they say,
> Into her bones was sent:
> It dried her body like a cinder,
> And almost turn'd her brain to tinder.

Her brain is a part of her body like her bones and the metaphorical fire that dries her body settles in her mind, transforming her into a mad woman. Here the divisions between the inside and outside and the disruptions of these boundaries fluctuate. The fire sent into her body evacuates her brain, the fire turns what it touches to "tinder" rather than the reverse which is normally the case, the "tinder" feeding the fire. And again Martha Ray's body and mind are tangled, the fire that betokens her betrayal also representing her pregnancy.

As her brain ceases to understand reality, her body represents her as woman:

'Tis said, a child was in her womb,

As now to any eye was plain;

She was with child, and she was mad,

Yet often she was sober sad

Unlike Wordsworth's act of creation which emerges from a brain seemingly dislocated from its presence in physical space, Martha Ray's brain is overwhelmed by her body and her act of procreation goes on nevertheless. The external evidence of her pregnancy which is "plain...to any eye" and the internal evidence, her madness and her sadness, are mingled so that it is difficult to distinguish the symptom from the disease, or the madness from the pregnancy. The speaker wishes that it was the "cruel father" who had died, echoing the title of the popular ballad "The Cruel Mother." The shifting of cruelty from mother to father indicates a sympathy for the position of the mother that is not evidenced in the earlier ballad, where a child returns from the dead to chastise his murdering mother. The pregnancy and madness are both constructed out of the narratives of witnesses filtered through the speaker's consciousness. He draws together the collected perceptions and relays them to the listener, adding the

listener's own perceptions into the story as part of it:

> Sad case for such a brain to hold
>
> Communion with a stirring child!
>
> Sad case, as you may think, for one
>
> Who had a brain so wild!

Alan Bewell has likened the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* to case studies, and Wordsworth's use of the word "case" to describe the situation of Martha seems to add strength to this interpretation. The case of lawyers and doctors and other professionals works in the same manner as the suitcase which is supposed to contain things. In Martha's case her brain is supposed to hold the case. She is the container for the "stirring child" and should be communing with it. Her body is supposed to be the "case" for the baby, but it has become something her brain must hold. Her brain cannot stand the "communion" and is too "wild" to be adequately domesticated into the maternal role. Yet Farmer Simpson claims that the child clings, like the mosses overwhelming the thorn earlier in the poem:

> Last Christmas when we talked of this,
>
> Old Farmer Simpson did maintain,
>
> That in her womb the infant wrought
>
> About its mother's heart, and brought
>
> Her senses back again:
>
> And when at last her time drew near,
>
> Her looks were calm, her senses clear.

But while the lichens in the beginning of the poem yield "a melancholy crop" and clasp the "poor thorn.../To drag it to the ground," the infant now seemingly brings the

mother back to sense, at least in the view of the farmer whose opinions are related to us by the speaker. Here the speaker for the second time frustrates us by at first refusing to go on, and then continuing by relating only what has been said. By hesitating to speak and then speaking, qualifying what he now says with negatives, he makes what he has said up to this point bear the aspect of truth in it. Yet so far all he has related is hearsay.

No more I know, I wish I did,
And I would tell it all to you;
For what became of this poor child
There's none that ever knew:
And if a child was born or no,
There's no one that could ever tell;
And if 'was born alive or dead,
There's no one knows, as I have said,
But some remember well,
That Martha Ray about this time
Would up the mountain often climb.

The slippery story goes from positing a possible child to imagining what could have happened to the child. The narratives build upon negatives, creating out of nothing an imaginary child who (perhaps) when it ceased to exist was murdered. The fiction of the child can also be murdered by unravelling the story, aborting its weave, and establishing that there was no child. The child only exists through the agency of the sea captain and his anxious strategies seem to both disavow and enable maternal

agency at the same time. He tells us one thing and then undermines it, yet he cannot leave the story alone. Obsessively returning to the one tale that he cannot completely avoid, Wordsworth's narrator tries to legitimize his own interpretation of nature. As he wishes for a story of infanticide, he wants to pretend that infanticide is all talk and no action. Of course the only one who would know certainly of the existence or non-existence of the child, Martha Ray, has ceased to be a person and is a creation--an effect of scenery. The difference between knowledge and memory serves to underline also the importance of location: Martha Ray is in what could be the wrong place at the wrong time. Ironically, what is called "her time" is the moment of her undoing. "Her time" is not her own at all, but the moment of the birth of the child and a signal of the end of her subjectivity.

The narrator's link between Martha Ray with possible witchery also links her to infanticide as it was perceived a century prior. Even as Wordsworth is writing this poem the link between witchcraft and infanticide has been abolished. Witchcraft falls to the wayside as a means of punishing recalcitrant women, even as infanticide remains. The evil which previously had been located outside moves inward. The narrator wishes to distance himself from the old superstitions even as he has trouble ridding himself of them. He depends upon the words of others--some of whom claim to have heard "cries," some who swear that these "Were voices of the dead"-- even as he decries these interpretations: "I cannot think, whate'er they say,/They had to do with Martha Ray." Again the narrator does not question the existence of the cries or

their link to the dead, but rather their connection to Martha Ray. His superstitious mind will countenance what is most unprovable and what deviates most from his supposed empiricism, yet he refuses to make the logical step here. If, in fact, what the villagers said was true, linking Martha Ray to these supernatural phenomena would be sensible. Even the rejection of Martha's role, like all that goes against the flow of the sensational narrative the sea captain wishes to tell, is subsumed under a qualifying, "but."

After only relating the stories of other people, the sea captain describes something that he has experienced himself. He reports climbing the mountain in a rainstorm and seeing "A jutting crag" under which he tries to take shelter. When he gets to it "Instead of a jutting crag, I found/A woman seated on the ground." But again this perception is not so simply recorded, "And, as I am a man" precedes what should be a simple declaration of fact. Her existence as a woman instead of a rock, depends upon his existence as a man. If he is not a man, she is not a woman and, of course, we know that the sea captain is not a man but a voice created by Wordsworth who is a man. Drawing attention to the poem's existence as a fiction, as he has done throughout, Wordsworth frustrates our desire for both sensation and truth. Here the action is opposed to the action of the poem thus far; instead of reading humanity into nature, the sea captain interprets what is human as an aspect of nature. He has again created his narrative from negatives. This scene is also the first encounter between the sea captain and the character of Martha, as all that he has told us so far is the talk and

speculation of the village people and has no historical "reality." For him this scene is grounded in a specific time and place yet the encounter is disappointing for the reader, even as it is "enough" for the speaker:

I did not speak--I saw her face,

Her face it was enough for me;

I turned about and heard her cry.

In the first moment the sight of a face--like that of the dreaded Medusa--silences the sea captain, yet the sea captain shifts the fear from himself to Martha Ray, splitting witnessing from fear. Somehow in this stanza the witness moves due to the agency of the moon, the blue skies, and the "little breezes" from the sea captain to the reader. Shuddering is Martha's and the "you" hears her cry. By the end of this stanza, the line has changed to "She shudders and you hear her cry."

The questioner within the poem continues to interrogate the speaker:

'But what's the thorn? And what's the pond?

'And what's the hill of moss to her?

'And what's the creeping breeze that comes

'The little pond to stir?'

I cannot tell; but some will say

She hanged her baby on the tree,

Some say she drowned it in the pond,

Which is a little step beyond,

But all and each agree,

The little babe was buried there,

Beneath the hill of moss so fair.

The consensus, then, is that the importance of the place rests on its function as a grave for the infant. It is where the woman's creation has been destroyed, and we are given several options as to how this has occurred. The only thing that is certain is that the hill of moss is a grave. When in the following stanza our speaker tells us that he cannot believe that the reddened moss has infant blood upon it, his reasoning relies on the belief that she could not "kill an infant thus!" He does not deny that she is capable of killing the child, but rather he discusses the method she might have employed. Immediately he slides into the vague voice of the "some" who "say":

Some say, if to the pond you go,

And fix on it a steady view,

The shadow of a babe you trace,

A baby and a baby's face,

And that it looks at you;

When e'er you look on it, 'tis plain

The baby looks at you again.

The surface of the pond reveals to the "you" a baby's face even as it reflects the "you" as much as it reveals a baby. Now landscape is thus seen to reflect directly the spectator and to deny the possibility of a truth which is unconnected to the observer.

For it is obvious here that the "baby's face" is constructed from a blurry image that is actually that of the one who looks. Made out of looks, the baby looks back only when looked upon. The baby cannot exist unless the "you" traces its features into the pond. We, the lookers, are forced into the position of the child, into taking the child's role, rather than the point of view of the mother.

In the penultimate stanza the sea captain speaks of how the desire of the community to bring Martha Ray "to justice" has been thwarted by their suspicions in the same way that her crime is constructed out of their superstitions. They attempt to uncover the body of the infant,

> But then the beauteous hill of moss
> Before their eyes began to stir;
> And for full fifty yards around,
> The grass it shook upon the ground;
> But all do still aver
> The little babe is buried there,
> Beneath that hill of moss so fair.

Again the speaker resorts to measurement, the way a fisherman insists on the exact size of the one that got away. Always the fugitive fish is the largest. Though Wordsworth rejected the accusation of tautology leveled against this poem, the tautologous nature of superstition is that everything will confirm what preexists. The infanticide tale preexists Martha Ray. Nothing can disprove it. Superstition feeds

upon itself. The villagers search for the legal proof of infanticide when they have no real proof that there was even a baby in the first place. Like the laws governing infanticide which stated that a missing child was the equivalent of a murdered child, superstition comes to the same conclusion. The body of the child which lies under the ground has become symbolic. As the body transmutes into the landscape, landscape also protects the body and the fantasy of the body.

As the final stanza echoes the first with a surety that was not there earlier, perception has become knowledge, shifting from the viewer to the speaker. We approach the thorn again but we recognize it immediately as the site of infant murder. In keeping with the assimilated voices that inhabit the poem, the boundaries between you and I, between speaker and story collapse. The "you" who would speak in the first stanza to tell the story of a thorn overcome by moss now coincides with the "I", the speaker, who actually tells the tale:

I cannot tell how this may be,
But plain it is, the thorn is bound
With heavy tufts of moss, that strive
To drag it to the ground,
And this I know, full many a time,
When she was on the mountain high,
By day, and in the silent night,
When all the stars shone clear and bright,

That I have heard her cry,

'Oh misery! oh misery!

'O woe is me! oh misery!'

The speaker has replaced the "you" and the thorn has replaced Martha Ray. The "she" who cries out an added line of complaint is not identified as Martha; it could just as easily refer to the thorn as to the woman. The differences between a rock who turns out to be a woman and a tree who speaks like a woman collapse. As the mother recedes into the landscape of the poem, her voice recedes into the poem's metrical form. Her spoken words serve stress and rhythmic needs rather than those of narrative. They are quite superfluous to the plot of the poem. It is here that the poem bears the most resemblance to its balladic forebear.

iii. "Impregnated with Passion": Wordsworth's Ballad

> The simple manners which prevail among most nations in the *infancy* of society, are peculiarly favourable to [the] exertions [of Poetic Genius]. In this primitive state of nature, the manners, sentiments, and passions are...perfectly ORIGINAL. (Duff, cited in *Prose Works*, 168) [emphasis mine]

The British traditional ballad can be "defined only by example" claims Friedman (6) and he finds examples in Thomas Percy's influential *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882), and

Kittredge's 1904 abridgement of Child which at last defines the ballad as "a short narrative poem adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterized by complete impersonality as far as the author or singer is concerned" (ix). Like the story of infancy, the history of balladry remains difficult to trace. Little can be verified, and like the sea captain in "The Thorn," "one must resort to inference" (Friedman 17) to fill in the gaps in the narrative.

The ballad, always associated with the oral and not the written, and seeming to emanate from the rural working class, possesses no author and appears unconsciousness of itself as "art." In a tangle of repetitions and overlapping stories, ballads borrow from each other and distort themselves. At its supposedly purest and most unmediated form prior to its transcription, the ballad seems to articulate the unconscious voice of a silent, illiterate populace, in much the same way as the infanticide ballad expressed the voice of the pre-Oedipal child.[5] At the moment of its transcription, the ballad loses its legitimacy, and its function alters. Once it is perceived as valuable in itself--a museum piece--it is rarefied and reified. At this imprecise historical moment the rural peasantry who engendered this form also becomes an endangered species. As Susan Stewart writes regarding the written forms of oral genres, "The *writing* of oral genres always results in a residue of lost context

---

[5] The influential *Reliques* of Percy which Wordsworth claimed had redeemed British poetry asserted: "In a polished age, like the present, I am sensible that many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowances to be made for them. Yet have they, for the most part, a pleasing simplicity, and many artless graces, which in the opinion of no mean critics have been thought to compensate for the want of higher beauties, and if they do not dazzle the imagination, are frequently found to interest the heart. (*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*).

and lost presence that literary culture imbues with a sense of nostalgia and even regret" (135). The ballad's internal cohesion, already a myth, becomes further corrupted by the desire to claim its truth as artifact and to freeze it forever in one unyielding form. Stewart asserts, "it is clear that authenticity is possible as a concept only in a situation that, in fact, *has* an external history. The problem of authenticity arises in situations where there is a self-conscious perception of mediation, a sense of distance between one era and another, one world view and another; a sense of historical periodization, transformation and even rupture" (136).

The problem in complying with the wishes of the historian arises out of the ballad's very nature: "The artistry, however, belongs to the governing pattern, to the genre, not to the individual ballad" (Friedman 19). Any sense of individual authorship or distinguishable change cannot be admitted without jeopardizing the authenticity of the whole. Additions by individual minstrels are considered "contaminations." The ballad flourishes only in a certain kind of environment, one that has become increasingly rare by the end of the eighteenth century: "A reasonably homogeneous community, one in which there is a high degree of social cohesion, uniform social attitudes, a common cultural background and only vaguely individuated tastes..." (Friedman 25). The traditional ballad had already been replaced by the printed and more fashionable broadside ballad as cities grew. As a result, only the Lowlands of Scotland and the North of England retained the traditional forms.

Until the late eighteenth century there was no distinction between a folk ballad

and popular ballad. The separation between the two forms occurred alongside the "revival" of the earlier form which "was simply the translation of the genre from an active life on the popular level to a "museum life" on the sophisticated level" (Friedman 9). Prior to this, the term "ballad" was used "almost exclusively for the broadside ballads hawked about the streets of London and provincial centers and at county fairs" (Friedman 35). But even as early as the sixteenth century, the complaint was common that the genuine ballad was being overtaken by its commercial counterpart. It was suggested that the ballad was being imported from London printshops to the rural fairs by "ballad-mongers" capitalizing on the "proverbial gullibility" of the rural populace (Friedman 57).

The lines between discrete texts cannot be maintained on paper, nor can the boundaries that establish the authenticity of the text itself. Unschooled popularizers borrowed willy nilly from the "genuine," and even the more "genuine" ballad scholars occasionally sank to prettifying and doctoring what came their way. The oral nature which defined the ballad undermined the possibility of maintaining essential distinctions. As Percy (1765) writes in the introduction to an influential compilation,

> The old minstrel ballads...abound with antique words and phrases, are extremely incorrect, and run into the utmost licence of metre; they have also a romantic wildness, and are in the true spirit of chivalry. The other sort...have a low or subordinate correctness, sometimes bordering on the insipid (lix).

What is incorrect renders itself genuine, as correctness becomes insipid, modern, and,

essentially, false. Despite these familial struggles, the two reverted to form when faced with a common enemy; "in their mutual opposition to sophisticated poetry, the broadside and the traditional ballad come very near to uniting" (Friedman 59). Wordsworth denies even this most basic distinction between the ballad and poem by making his poetry out of the ballad.

In the revival of ballads, the "cult of simplicity" contributed to what was denigrated as a sentimental bastardization of the ballad form. This disruption of the ballad's supposed original purity translated "the story of martial adventure to the pathetic tale of the peaceful village" (Aiken 29). By the 1790s, the minstrel, who had previously been viewed only as the conveyance of the ballad or as a source of balladic corruption, became valorized, as did the pastoral elements of the ballad. Wordsworth considered the ballad "a region of true simplicity and genuine pathos" (Friedman 178) and Percy devoted an essay to the history of minstrelsy. The revived ballad of the eighteenth century focussed on the minstrel figure so that "the way Wordsworth conceived his poetic mission... [was] little more than a dramatization of Percy's account of minstrel life" (Friedman 215). In this way the "new" ballad confused the setting for the transmission of the ballad with the setting of the ballad's plot. Likewise, the ballad's mode of dissemination, the minstrel, became a character within it. The supposed audience of the ballad--the rural poor--became another source of characters. Prior to the idealization of the minstrel as an individual figure, the minstrel was one whose individuality melted into the telling of the tale so that story

and performance were indistinguishable. As the ballad becomes "revived," writing replaces orality and the immediacy of the performance; the history of the form becomes reiterated within the form.[6]

The fantasy that the ballad had come to represent, of an individual male minstrel roaming the world, collecting and distributing verses, was as idealistic as that of the male poet finding poetry in landscape. Karen Swann, speaking of Wordsworth's Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, emphasizes Wordsworth's consciousness of the differences between the literary and the popular and suggests that he waxes most eloquent in this attack on "the extravagant and addictive products of the press" (87). These stories seduce by arousing the emotions of readers:

> His social critique, however, gathers urgency from a recognition that exorbitancy always threatens literature: although the pleasure of poetry originates in and feeds on passion, passion always threatens to exceed the bounds of what can impart pleasure to others or even to the passionate individual. (87)

In his use of the ballad form Wordsworth is both complying with and differentiating himself from the popular, both locating himself in a historical moment and attempting to transcend it.

---

[6] As Karen Swann points out so brilliantly in her essay "Suffering and Sensation in *The Ruined Cottage*," much of virtuosity that Wordsworth's critics admire in his work arises out of the distance of the speaker (here she refers to the Pedlar, but I believe the same holds true for the Sea Captain in "The Thorn") and serves to "ensure the difference between Wordsworth's poetry and the products of the popular press..." (87).

The critical reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* seemed to take two paths. Robert Southey suggested that the book's emphasis on tales of the supernatural would encourage superstition rather than dispel it, as if such subject matter had the power to cast a spell or emit a contagion (Jacobus). Southey's concern was that a superstition described within the text would take root in the too fertile minds of its readers. Others complained that eponymous ballads published anonymously were *not* lyrical, *not* ballads, and, worst of all, boring. One of the critiques seemed to arise from a high culture wishing to maintain a good distance from the plain language of the common people. Southey suggested that Wordsworth had not distinguished himself adequately from his subject: "The author should have recollected that he personates tiresome loquacity, becomes tiresome himself" (Jacobus). Other critics found that Wordsworth and Coleridge had removed the drama from their ballads.[7]

Motivating these two critiques is one of the central issues of *Lyrical Ballads*: the link between gender and the marketplace. At the moment in the late 18th-century when the woman becomes identified with the mother, she has also become associated with the literary marketplace, both as writer and reader. The woman who refuses motherhood has become a bad mother. The woman who rejects her ordained maternal role but also has the temerity to write threatens not only the well-being of her own

---

[7] Mary Jacobus cites Dr. Burney's review of *Lyrical Ballads*: "these effects were not produced by the *poetry*:--we have been as much affected by pictures of misery and unmerited distress, in *prose*" (160).

child but that of other children: specifically, the male writers who fear her influence and popularity among an audience composed of women like her.

Like the ballad itself, which never spoke the words assigned it by ballad transcribers, the infants in ballads are ventriloquized by others. The ballad's function seems to rest in its presence as a sign of what has been lost, a symptom of the artificiality of the present moment. If the ballad was revived at the moment of masculine anxiety, as female-authored novels seemed to threaten, then perhaps this revival has something to do with these fears. In fact, Swann suggests that Wordsworth's poetics were tinged with some nervousness:

> Wordsworth's was just one among many voices displacing a range of anxieties about the power of representations in a technological age onto a nascent mass public, a public often identified with popular sensational fiction, feminine characters and plots, and a feminine or feminized audience. (90)

Swann contends that Wordsworth adopted "a familiar narrative machinery" in order to allude to gender and class and to a specific class of female readers.[8]

Wordsworth the poet saw himself in the role of minstrel, the medium for the expression of the poem. The language in the older poetic forms is on the one hand transparently in the service of the plot and on the other completely opaque, as when nonsense syllables are deployed for the sake of rhythm alone. Child's "A" version of "The Cruel Mother," begins:

---

[8] Swann specifically argues that Wordsworth was not trying to naturalize a social fact and that Wordsworth's concern was one "phenomenon, the market."

And there she's leand her back to a thorn,

Oh and alelladay, or and alelladay

And there she has her baby born.

Ten thousand times good night and be wi thee. (220)

Wordsworth almost reverses this relation when he dispenses with what has been directly relayed in the older ballads and makes what plot there is as repetitive and unyielding as the older form's nonsense. One important change is that the speakers within the ballad--the characters such as the returning murdered infant--are no longer given voice. For Wordsworth there comes to be only one Speaker and one set of words:

> I have said that each of these poems has a purpose.... But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature. This object I have endeavoured in these short essays to attain by various means; by tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings...." (*Preface* 122)

In a diagnosis of the symptoms of a craving mind--symptoms resembling those of the female hysteric rather than the male genius--Wordsworth also exhibits what Swann terms the "difficulty in separating." The hysteric places psychic disorder in a bodily location so that a child's trauma over the separation from its mother, for instance, could be somatized into a physical ailment. Swann links the need to hearken back to the same object repeatedly, to continually recite the same phrases, to identify

delusion "with a spot,"--which could be either a site or a stain--and an additional need to "generate the positions of author, speaker, and audience" with the relation between child and a forbidding law: "For, at each turn, an apparatus called in to regulate a mesmerizing representational effect itself becomes an object of fascination. The I collects himself by propagating himself, subdues fascination by proliferating loci of fascination, compulsively cleaves to the structures that promise mastery--until, at the end of the poem, he claims fellowship with the rounds of the elements themselves..." (89).

Wordsworth's desire is not to transcend the demands of a newly born mass market, but rather to give birth to a hybrid form that has the capacity to be both poetic and political in the same medium. Wordsworth imagines a way to morally uplift what is feminine and sensational, and therefore debased and popular, without tainting a high literary kind of conception. The trouble is that "the more Wordsworth tries to realize the abandoned woman fully and sympathetically, the more firmly he locates himself on the side of delusion..." (Swann 93). Despite the author's assertion to his reader in his Note to "The Thorn" that he was taking care to choose words "impregnated with passion" that should "likewise convey passion to Readers," and his admonition that "the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings," Wordsworth's words arise out of an obvious contradiction.[9] Like

---

[9] Wordsworth himself opposed poetry to science in the "Preface": "Much confusion has been introduced into the criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science."

Freud, who attempted to find the biological basis for feelings, Wordsworth wishes to trace not only a science but a history. Claiming that poetry is history *and* science, Wordsworth makes the empirical--the focus of scientists and historians, but not generally the domain of the poet--important to his work. For he is saying to his reader, "This is *true*," at the same time as he says, "This is *my* truth." Objective and subjective as distinct are put into place and obliterated in the same movement. Like the sea captain whose insistence on measurement arises in the same moment as his superstitions, Wordsworth flattens affect and truth into one.

The collapse of form and content and subject and object distinctions which occurs in lyric poems written about abortion by women is the subject of Barbara Johnson's essay "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion." Johnson attributes to language the power of giving life: "For if the apostrophe is said to involve language's capacity to give life and human form to something dead or inanimate, what happens when these questions are literalized?" (189). The aborted child exists within the poem because it is called into existence through language. In the same way, Wordsworth's ballad quickens around another form of life. By re-animating the landscape that contains the body of the child, Wordsworth's poem contains the voice of the child returned just as the old ballad did. The sea captain creates the narrative, returning to the scene of the crime repeatedly, and speaks the part of the murdered child. The poem rests upon the sea captain's and the poet's identification with this child at the expense of the mother. She must be relegated to the inanimate and silent space of

otherness.

iv. Plots of Dead Babies

A number of issues raised by "The Thorn" are reiterated throughout the nineteenth century in the high cultural depiction of infanticide. I stress high culture because I believe it is this, more than the author's desire to claim one tradition and maintain distance from another, that determines a kind of presentation, even as infanticide plots abound in both popular and high culture. In the literary infanticide narrative the plot of infanticide--the wish to kill--preexists both mother and child. In the same way that the stories of the landscape, the voices of villagers, the sea captain, and of Wordsworth himself, seem to deny Martha Ray's agency, so the nineteenth century infanticidal mother seems to act not of her own volition but in response to a certain pressure from outside. She can generate a child, but the idea for infanticide is not hers at all. The infanticide is rarely narrated by the mother, but if it is, it takes the form of a confession given long after the murder has occurred. The narrative filters a story through a screen of narrators and time.

The text of maternal infanticide mirrors an external reality that is itself interpenetrated by texts. There can never be certainty assigned to the number of infanticides in the nineteenth century nor a literature capable of describing or circumscribing the infanticide. Infanticide as a literary plot seems to function as a

hinge between the real and the fictional; always infused with too much emotion, always veiled by too much repression, it cannot be completely metaphorical or completely literal. Why does such a story come to occupy the minds of so many authors at this time and what does the preoccupation with this crime illustrate about the position of women and mothers?

If Wordsworth's poetics relies on the return to a "spot,"--the "spots of time" that inspire "The Prelude,"-- and an obsessiveness that refuses to relinquish the landscape of the past, his mother-figures often exhibit this same trait: "In many poems, finally, a person is seen returning to the place of his birth, and which is now actually or by implication a grave" (Hartman 141). This returning becomes complicated in "The Thorn," when the sea captain returns to the place where Martha Ray gave birth and killed her child and to which Martha Ray also returns. Swann links this pattern to Freud's fort-da game to suggest that the "speaker's distance from and mastery of his subject" is "often claimed to ensure the difference between the poetry of suffering and the poetry of sensation" (87). If the sea captain's control of the narrative ensures that there can be only one plot in "The Thorn," it is a plot of cowardice; a semi-plot, like that of the fort-da game, the economy of which depends upon the exchange of a narrative for a fear of rejection.

Dizzingly, Wordsworth collapses distance temporally and spatially, so that historical reality becomes folded into one scene recurring over and over in memory. Temporality disappears as the poet reclaims the past through landscape. The distance

between Martha Ray's form and the form of the thorn collapses so that landscape and character are indistinguishable; the narrator becomes implicated in the plot and the plot itself cannot be separated from the speaker and the setting. The "distance" between the poet and his subject matter becomes the only distance, a distance that creates the illusion of difference between his form and the balladic forms he appropriates. In forging a connection between the landscape, the act of infanticide, and the narrative of the infanticide which is dependent upon the outside observer, Wordsworth makes the mother as an actor disappear.

The plot of maternal infanticide might be said to attain a certain canonicity with Wordsworth's transcription of the oral balladic form. At this moment what had once been everyday becomes mythic and proliferates both in high literature and popular or folk culture. How has it come to pass that high literary production at the end of the eighteenth century refigures the superstitions of the rural peasantry from a century before into the fantasies of the poet/novelist?

v. Pre-Oedipal Plots and Poets

The one crime in British Law that required the accused to prove her innocence rather than leaving the burden of proof on the accusers was infanticide. The unmarried mother of a dead child would be hard put to free herself from the taint. Infanticide as a crime is nearly impossible to distinguish from still birth, a natural

occurrence. Pregnancy itself was not difficult to disguise, even as the prevalent fashion wearing of the "six-month pad"--a pad that could simulate the burgeoning belly of a pregnant woman--rose to prominence in the 1790s (Gelpi 5). Infanticide always clouded by misinterpretation could be suspected of any woman. As "The Thorn" illustrates, the fear of infanticide could be inspired by landscape without any objective, empirical proof. Even as Wordsworth separates himself from the speaker's suspicions, he has set in place a story that is difficult to erase.

The ballad, a form without lineage, seems always to be used to ensure patrilineage. As history becomes "fact," as science seems to threaten the subjective, as individualism triumphs over the communal, the ballad historically has been used to evoke a lost past. As Wordsworth suggests in his 1850 *Preface*, "...Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion...." The Poet is not limited, says Wordsworth, as biographers, historians, chemists, botanists or mineralogists are, by problems of evidence. The ballad and the poem need not trouble with specifics or individuals but speak most instead to a generalized heart that shares the passions *of men*.

This nostalgic desire is shared by both infanticide narratives and ballads in nineteenth century England. Both are positioned at a moment of transition socially and economically. They are also always written as historical fictions. Just as the desire for a true narrative of a lost time, a desire for recovering something arises, the

consciousness of what has been lost increases. History comes out of the desire to restore the past and fix it in writing. Through history we get the sense that the unrecoverable infant, the unrecoverable story of infant murder, like the story of our own childhoods, our own babyhood, has no certain presence yet can never be completely absent.

There is no accuracy and no possibility of determining the difference between the still-born child and the murdered babe. Floating the lungs in water was no way to tell. Eliciting a confession from the mother was no way to know. Suspicion based upon likelihood in most cases was proof enough.

There was no infanticide truth that could be uncovered. As with the ballad whose history is necessarily clouded, whose legitimacy is based on illegitimacy--there is no father. The prime witness is the dead baby, and the commonality of the crime seems to be as tied to the popular perception and sympathy for the child as to any exteriority. And yet it is the absence of the mother not the father that Wordsworth's "child as father to the man" plot demands. As Mary Jacobus notes in *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference*, "The mother must be absent or dead in order for the child to be father to the man..." (240).

If Wordsworth tries to separate himself from his sea captain and his sea captain's suspicious mind, he, like the sea captain, wishes for an empiricism rooted in the natural world. He, too, grounds himself in what *is* in order to find what *might be* and uses the natural world as fodder for his plot. Specifically he uses the natural plot

of the natural mother. The natural is plotless; the lyrical, the ballad which is all plot, must be translated into its high literary form and distinguished from the feminine and popular. Similarly, the female act of creation must be annulled and transformed into the male act--the writing of poetry.

Susan Winnett's critique of Peter Brooks's *Reading for Plot* rests on the absence of female subjectivity in Brooks's model. Brooks's theory of Oedipal plots that are determined to reach their endings and determined to read birth only in terms of death denies the maternal role. Winnett argues that although this male model achieves pleasure through literally viewing birth as a means to an end, the maternal plot is something quite "other". As Winnett writes, "Most important for our narratological purposes, however, both childbirth and breastfeeding force us to think forward rather than backward; whatever finality birth possesses as a physical experience pales in comparison with the exciting, frightening sense of the beginning of a new life" (509). Mistaking form for theme, Brooks, according to Winnett, cannot grasp woman as other than a "stage." Wordsworth short-circuits narrative entirely by killing off the speaker/child as part of the plot. He does not resuscitate the child and bring him to language in the manner of older ballads, but instead introduces the narrator/observer to the scene. Plot becomes subjectivity and not action, and the mother and landscape merge; birth and death coincide.

The Romantic poet equates the mother's body with nature itself and cannot

perceive its boundaries.[10] From the point of view of the child/poet, the mother seems to represent an idealized pre-Oedipal, and thus a pre-linguistic oneness that is both a comfort and a threat to autonomy and individualism. But since this unrecoverable unity between mother and child always precedes language and consciousness, it is always lost to the poet. As in Lacan's mirror, the child who "overcomes" the "obstruction of his support" (presumably the mother), perceives his own image for the first time (1). Entering into a social world and into the consciousness of selfhood and otherness, the child achieves autonomy only at the price of alienation: "This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation--and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification..." (4). At this moment the unity between mother and child is all at once shattered, and the price that subjectivity exacts is this lost first love. The remainder becomes history, the memory of her loss and of the time before the loss tinged with the fear of returning and losing selfhood, as well as the desire to return and regain unity. Lacan's narrative demands a temporal

---

[10] Feminist critics have examined the way the ideals of Romanticism figure women. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi has argued that in Romanticism, language replaces the mother and kills her. Similarly Margaret Homans has declared that, "Each Wordsworthian landscape contains the buried presence of a maternal or feminine figure, whether she is a figurative maternal quality diffused through nature, or a more literal figure who once lived" (25). While Homans's assertion seems accurate, she seems to make a distinction between landscape and the mother--in a way that Wordsworth often does not. I would suggest that the buried figure is not that of a mother, but that of the child, for the mother cannot be contained.

and spatial plotting. There is first the difference between "then" and "now" that history requires, and then the gap between the mirrored image and the one who perceives it and locates an entire world behind it. By equating the mother with nature--with the essentially unchangeable, unmovable, impervious to time and space--the male child/poet can play the part of culture and represent nature in his art. The mother who once contained, and the nature that contain, become contained within art.[11]

But the child/poet constantly fears that the mother's desire can overpower and destroy him; she will reclaim language and deny him entry into it. She must then be made into a literal and figurative container through which he can identify himself; what is not her is him. The buried figure is, thus, a baby that the mother in her omnipotence, her refusal of boundary, has destroyed. The child smothered by the mother is also the poet struggling against the mother/nature for self-expression.

---

[11] As M.H. Abrams in his seminal *The Mirror and the Lamp* insists concerning Wordsworth: "This container is unmistakably the poet; the materials of a poem come from within, and they consist expressly of neither objects nor actions, but of the fluid feelings of the poet himself" (47).

Chapter Three

The Impermeable Heart of the Heart of Midlothian: Infanticide and the Problem of Historical Fiction

> "The crime is rather a favorite of the law, this species of murther being one of its ain creation."
>
> Sir Walter Scott

> How, indeed, could speech exhaust the meaning of speech. . .except in the act that engenders it? Thus Goethe's reversal of its presence as the origin of things, 'In the beginning was the act', is itself reversed in its turn: it was certainly the Word (verbe) that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation, but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it.
>
> Jacques Lacan

Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) describes the effects of an act of maternal infanticide that has never happened. In a footnote, Scott reminds his reader of a law appearing on the Scottish Statutes from 1690 through 1803 under which a woman who has concealed her pregnancy was regarded as guilty of infanticide should the child be found dead or disappear entirely. Concealment of pregnancy constituted an attempt to evade authority. To render authority powerless in the face of the possibility of child-murder became equivalent to killing. Convicted of

concealment, Euphemia--Effie--Deans has been sentenced to hanging not for what she has done but because she has refused to put her pregnancy into words. If she had voiced her condition prior to the child's birth, she would be considered innocent of concealment and thus of infanticide as well. Scott creates the crime as a plot of law, a story that is made up out of nothing but words; he also reveals an anxiety about discovering the truth behind it. At the same time, an actual infanticide goes unpunished as Effie Deans is sentenced to death for a crime she did not commit. In this chapter I will establish a link between the figure of euphemism and language that confuses cause and effect. Like the law in Scott's novel euphemism proceeds under the assumption that words precede action. At the same time I will argue that this confusion between words and actions, cause and effect, presents a problem particular to the task of the historical novelist.

Euphemism, the rhetorical figure of concealment--fair language disguising the ugly truth--is not only Effie's name, but the crime of which she is accused. If Effie had confessed her pregnancy, she would not have been guilty of concealing, a crime that is considered the same as infant murder. Clearly illustrating the unfairness of a law which puts words ahead of actions, Scott suggests that infanticide is a creation of law not a reality. As a figure euphemism indicates a degeneration of language, as innocent words become corrupted by their metonymic associations:

> The mild or decent word, when applied to the disagreeable or indecent idea, begins to be shunned by speakers on account of its dubious meaning, and soon comes actually to express the meaning which it was intended at first to suggest, or even to conceal. (Greenough and Kittredge, 307)

In the same way that innocent words become infected by the company they keep,

Effie Deans is seen as a child-killer not because of what she has done, but because of what she has not said, the words she has held unspoken. Concealing the reality of death, sex, excrement and such, euphemism lets innocent words bear the brunt of meaning. Concealing childbirth, Euphemia Deans bears the sentence of infanticide. Further, when Jeanie Deans refuses to lie on behalf of her sister, she assures that Effie will be convicted. Not speaking again seems the equivalent of killing.

Robert Burchfield suggests that the impetus behind the use of euphemism "springs from a deeply instinctive belief" that by avoiding direct language for bad things "one will gradually cause them to disappear" (28). Euphemism displays a superstitious confusion between words and actions, between thoughts and deeds. This superstitious belief that naming precedes action, or even causes action, reverses the more common assumption that language is secondary and disrupts the order of creation. Scott himself seems to give language the power to create infanticide, and to avoid the possibilities that infanticide actually exists.[1] Like the law in Scott's novel, euphemism draws upon the idea that by erasing words one erases things.

Effie, who bears a child and misplaces it, but does not kill it, is the double of Madge Wildfire who also gives birth to a child. Madge's child is murdered by Madge's own mother in her misguided attempt to safeguard her daughter's reputation. Effie and Madge's missing children--sons of the same father--occupy almost interchangeable positions within the plot and the content of the book. The confusion between these two babies provides the empty cradle at the heart of Midlothian. Scott's interpretation of infanticide as constructed from texts is complicated by the story of

---

[1] In 1656 the first recorded use of the word appeared as "a good or favourable interpretation of a bad word" (Burchfield, 21).

Madge Wildfire and Meg Murdockson where the crime occurs within the context of a rural setting outside of the textualizing influences of lawyers, history and civilization. While Madge and Meg live in the old world of peasants and ballads, Jeanie and Effie represent a newer lifestyle of class mobility and historical change and incipient urbanity. The story of Jeanie and her sister Euphemia revolves around the absence of infanticide, while that of Meg Murdockson and her daughter Madge has an actual infanticide at its heart. Jeanie and Effie are located firmly in the history by virtue of their connections to historical figures. Meg and Madge, conversely, only associate peripherally with historical figures even as their behavior provides momentum for the plot. Meg and Madge represent a pre-history, static and unwritten, at odds with law and domesticity, which can be compared to the composure and morality of Jeanie and the ambition of Effie. Madge's child stolen and murdered, Effie's child stolen and sold to gypsies--these missing bodies create the story around their absence. In Scott's novel the notion of causality is broken down so that the abilities of the historian to describe what has happened, the lawyer to dictate what should happen, and the novelist to straddle the boundaries between fact and fiction, are thrown into question. In this novel cause and effect constantly reverse each other so that it impossible to be certain which comes first.

ii. Telling the Past

As the ballad changed from a living memory to dead text, the newly professionalized historians and archivists devoted themselves to its exhumation. Scott's version of the historical romance serves to reconnect the ballad with history.

Making the characters in his novels represent the singers of ballads, Scott places the ballad in a specific time period and locates it as an emblem of the past rather than as an ongoing practice Where Wordsworth made the ballad modern by rewriting it, Scott resigns it to its fate as a relic from antiquity.

Georg Lukacs suggests that the historical novel, when successful, relies on the evocation of human experience, as a neutral hero embarks on a journey that brings him (or her) in to contact with the "great men" of history. In the ideal historical novel "the hero is neutral because he is also fictional and therefore a free agent, able to form decisions which are not necessarily tied by the restrictive need to follow the events of recorded history" (Sanders 16). This conflict between the freedom of the character and the strictures of written history reflects a tension between the inflexible law of history which provides the novel with its setting and humanity which provides the novel with its characters. Lukacs considers a historical novel that merely recounts the behavior of the major figures to be a failure. Likewise, he argues, the novelist concerned only with historical accuracy will suffer. "It matters little whether the individual details, individual facts are historically correct or not," Lukacs writes, but rather it is a sense of "historical necessity" that makes Scott the "great poet of history" (58). For Lukacs the novel best exemplifying the historical spirit was *The Heart of Midlothian*. What strikes Lukacs in Jeanie is that she, a "peasant girl, uneducated, penniless and unfamiliar with the world," obtains her sister's pardon by walking to London to visit the Queen, thus finding a way to make law bend to human needs. This pilgrimage represents "the rich humanity and simple heroism of a really great human being" (58). Historical fiction claims the "new language of truth" which according to Nancy Armstrong marks the "great nineteenth century project to make

language identical with truth" (157). History itself can be seen, Armstrong claims, as a corrective to "the worst tendencies of the female mind," opposing the use of figurative language which conceals rather than to the literal which reveals. The feminine, identified with the duplicitous and figurative, was opposed to the masculine supposedly transparent rendering of truth exemplified by historical writing.

The history of great men was opposed to the domestic life of the individual, and history, distinctively male in nature, reflected reality without the intrusion of language. Historical novels are such because they are "works in which historical probability reaches a certain level of structural prominence" (Shaw 22). The historical novel embraces particularity while resting on rather uninspired plots to involve their readership, seeing history as the shaper of human beings (Fleischman 25) rather than human beings as shapers of history. Lukacs praised Scott's novels in general and *Heart of Midlothian* in particular for representing the lives of unimportant people in historical detail.

Caroline McCracken-Flesher argues that such a reading ties Scott's ideal history into "a tidy package in which....[he] negotiates an impasse among men by substituting gendered concerns for political ones. The contested body of nineteenth-century capital ultimately is reconstituted as Effie's body" (232). The substitution of one thing--in this case gender--for another, history, like the workings of euphemism, breaks down the boundaries and ultimately makes the bodies of knowledge indistinguishable. Fact blurs into fiction, superstition into truth and so on. The binary oppositions that provide a means of reading this novel are always closing in on each other, making one thing the same as another. *The Heart of MidLothian*'s progression from prison to home is really no progression at all. Leland Monk asserts this book

highlights the novel's similarity to a prison, "Nowhere and everywhere at once, invisible, no longer a locatable (and so escapable) site of novelistic interrogation" (290). The dichotomies collapse so the prison, novel, and the home seem structurally the same. Armstrong suggests that the reality described by novelists "tended to reduce and confine the family into a space that resembled a prison," and "began to pour their creative energy into scenes of violence, hallucination, and chaos that characteristically displayed a madwoman at their center" (164). This particular novel contains both madwomen and prisons; it contains them both physically and thematically.

What for Lukacs was a view of history as a shaping force and a sense of the individual's changing role, for Dorothy Van Ghent is a way to undermine the universals of human experience.[2] Valuing metaphor over metonomy, Van Ghent sees Jeanie's moral dilemma as inconsequential. As Shaw suggests, the problem with the historical novel is to achieve a balance between the individual consciousness and historical focus (49). Historical novels are capable of showing individuals in specific detail and particular time periods, at the expense, as Van Ghent points out, of transcendence.[3] Although critics who do not agree with Van Ghent's verdict that this

---

[2] Van Ghent suggests that the only possible reason for the last volume of the book is that Scott wrote it for money to furnish his new home, Abbotsford (114-115).

[3] Harry E. Shaw suggests that the difference between the two views of the novel rests on the "valorization of human interiority" versus an emphasis on historical context and exterior detail (119). For Shaw, Scott found in Jeanie Deans an ideal "historical figure who could serve as his protagonist without violating his sense of what matters in history" (214). Even so Shaw finds ambivalence about "things lost" in this novel and in all Scott's work (216). Robert C. Gordon considers the last part of the book "a disaster" and suggests that it illustrates "Scott's capacity for an infantile disregard of aesthetic decencies" (*Under Which King: A Study of the Scottish Waverly Novels* [Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966], 94) Robin Mayhead (*Walter Scott*, Cambridge, 1973) claims that the majority of critics regard *Midlothian* as Scott's best novel, but David C. Brown argues the opposite

novel holds an "incoherent world view" generally consider it one of Scott's best, most deplore its length and florid style (114). What is absent from these readings of historical novels in general, and Scott's novel in particular, is the sense of the local and domestic as part of history. Rather than view the domestic as historically situated and both Jeanie and Effie's desires in their context, critics tend to put the domestic and final volume as a weaker section, outside of real history. Opposing the ongoing and seemingly changeless domesticity with the disruptions of history, critics see the family as separate from the political history of men, and gender as a separate category entirely. While domestic life appears as a universal, natural and unchanging state, history refers to the politics of life outside the family. Scott's historical novel brings the two together, linking the individual in his or her home with the surrounding historical context.

Scott contextualizes his story of infanticide using an actual historical event, the uprising of the Porteous Mob in 1737.[4] The true story of the Porteous uprising engenders another story, as Scott allows Robertson/Staunton to play a role that links him to the true story as one of the leaders of the riot and to the fictional tale as the father of both Effie's and Madge Wildfire's missing sons. Robertson represents the

---

(*Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination*, London, Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1979). Ina Ferris's discussion of gender in Scott completely avoids the issue of this only novel where a woman serves as a protagonist (*The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991). Susan Morgan discusses the implications of a heroine as opposed to a hero and suggests that Scott's creation of Jeanie was "unconsciously feminist" ("Old Heroes and a New Heroine in the Waverly Novels." *ELH*, Fall, 1983).,

[4] Margaret Movshin Criscuola establishes to what degree Scott's use of the Porteous uprising is accurate and shows that despite his assertions otherwise Scott did some extensive reorganization of historical data. ("The Porteous Mob: Fact and Truth in *The Heart of Midlothian*, English Language Notes, September 1984).

public figure who leads a riot, while under his other name, Staunton, he is the father to the two missing children. In these roles, Staunton joins the two stories, occupying a place in each under a different name. In the Porteous plot where he leads the riot, Robertson dresses in the costume of Madge Wildfire. He thus plays his part in history in the guise of a madwoman. The uprising occurs when a group of Scots burn down the prison door and remove Captain Porteous, the representative of the King of England who was imprisoned there. Knowing that British law will not treat their Scottish interests justly, the mob hangs Porteous in retribution for his harshness towards the Scottish people. The author of the novel claims that the Porteous Plot was never solved completely and that the "imagination of the people of Edinburgh was long irritated, and their curiosity kept awake, by the mystery attending this extraordinary conspiracy" (85n). The telling of the story of the Porteous Mob itself is clouded with problems of establishing veracity: "I have been disappointed however, in obtaining the evidence on which this story rests" (86n). Even as the story of infanticide is based upon a purportedly historic truth, both stories, historical and fictional, revolve around the same sort of doubt.

But the story is always clouded with doubt because it is never spoken by the woman herself or by the child. The plot displaces itself and becomes the elaboration of a search for truth rather than the discovery of the truth itself. Since we can never know the truth about infanticide, the preoccupation of the narrator becomes the attempt to know. D. A. Miller suggests that narrative is "impotent" to change the facts, but can only control "the discursive framework in which they are perceived as such" (25); in Miller's view the boundary between the frame of the text and the text itself is impermeable. Intervening between narrative and truth, the historical novel,

however, both challenges the perceptions of fact and fiction and suggests that perception is all that matters. A mutant genre, by definition both fact and fiction, the historical novel implies there is no such thing as "impotent" narrative. Putting aside the ability to control facts, it focuses rather on the ability to engender texts. Making stories that appear plausible takes precedence over establishing doubtless truth.

Sandwiched between various prefaces and author's notes where Scott asserts historic details regarding the truth of his story lies a discrepancy between heart/feeling, and law/intellect. Scott writes that the letter of law was seldom enforced. The sentencing of mothers charged with infanticide resulted most commonly in banishment rather than hanging and "the comparative infrequency" of the crime led to a legal change in 1803 as the charge of concealment was dismantled (545). Nevertheless, in spite of this, the law still served another purpose, if it not that of punishment. In the words of the character of the lawyer Saddletree, "The crime is rather a favorite of the law, this species of murther being one of its ain creation" (60). It seems to me that the law serves the law creating a crime that will give lawyers something talk about and novelists some stories to tell. Law has a narrative that supersedes all others.

The circumstances that give rise to the infanticide plot--the legal statutes--exist in the historical past and not in the present of the reader and writer. Scott situates himself outside of the many frames of narration and makes clear to his reader the distinction between the present and past. First, in the introduction the author informs his readers of the real existence and real death of Helen Walker who represents the "prototype" of Jeanie (5). A postscript placed after the introduction but before the text

names Helen Walker as the real figure who made the journey to save her sister. The narrator addresses the "pleased and indulgent reader," and insists on the "authenticity of my historical narratives," appending a long and involved series of notes tracing Scott's own lineage and presumably justifying his authorship further (10).

In Chapter Two, I suggested that Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* represented a move away from the unauthored past of the oral ballad. Taking infanticide out of the broadside and writing it as a story about perception, Wordsworth's "The Thorn" is not so much a story of infanticide but a story of the suggestion of infanticide. Similarly Scott's novel can neither dispense with infanticide entirely nor describe it in full. Scott's inclusion of broadsides and ballads within the novel indicates his own self-conscious awareness of the textual history of the story he tells.

The account of Meg Murdockson's hanging: "The Last Speech, Confession, and Dying Words of Margaret McCraw, or Murdockson, executed on Harabee Hill, near Carlisle, the -- day of ---, 1737" discovered by Jeanie, years after the incident, on a crumpled broadside indicates Scott's awareness of the end of this kind of history. The broadside inside a novel recounts the "suspicious circumstances attending the birth of a child" which Meg is believed to have killed in order to preserve her own daughter Madge's reputation (499). This reference is the first written indication of any infanticide in the plot but also illustrates the movement of infanticide, first out of ballads and into broadsides in the late eighteenth century, and in the early nineteenth century from broadsides into novels (Vincent, 209). Foucault's suggestion that the episteme of the nineteenth century preoccupies itself with the veracity of evidence and moves from the mere discussion of facts to the struggle to find truth indicates another level in the plot of plots:

> we have moved from the exposition of the facts or the confession to the slow process of discovery; from the execution to the investigation; from the physical confrontation to the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator. It was not only the broadsheets that disappeared with the birth of a literature of crime, the glory of the rustic malefactor and his sombre transformation into hero by the process of torture and execution went with them (69).

The crime of child murder ceases to provide the plot for ballads spoken in the voice of the child or broadsides spoken in the voice of condemned prisoner about to be hanged. Along with the move from the popular forms of broadsides and ballads to novels, the infanticidal mother who had been, as Laura Berry suggests, a sentimental figure in social discourse, became rather a despised creature and one who must serve to generate "the discourse, the decipherable sign" of her deviance for all to see (Foucault, 11). Scott's quotation of the ballad and the broadside within his novel indicates his own ambivalent awareness that the antiquated mode of story telling which he greatly admires has already given way to the novel.

iii. Old Stories told in New Ways

On the one hand the story of maternal infanticide is a familiar one. The tale of the debased woman acting in desperation haunts the popular imagination from the sensational ballads of Burger at the end of the eighteenth century to the medical tracts of William Ryan in the 1860s. The change in the depiction and modes of representation of infanticide seems related to a new way of viewing criminality. Even as infanticide in texts becomes more and more common, it is rendered implausible

because it is a deviation from the seemingly eternal and transcendent virtues of the mother. Yet the more unnatural maternal infanticide was, given the overarching belief in the natural maternal goodness of woman, the more it seems to occur in discourse. The difference between infanticide in the ballad and infanticide in the novel rests upon a shift from the idea of reality to the idea of narrative. The textualization of the infanticide gives rise to a new problem in representation as the idea of a simple representation cannot face up to the issues of evidence and truth. While the broadside and ballad depend upon a simple rendering of truth, the novel's depiction is complicated by the problem of the narrator's relation to the story.

Child murder provides an ideal plot device in the nineteenth-century novel because it calls upon the difference between action and speech at the same time as it makes the two appear to be the same thing. Says the magistrate at Effie's trial, collapsing one thing into another so that the first part of the paragraph suggests the possibility that there was never a baby, while the end inflexibly calls for execution:

> A child may have been born, and it may have been conveyed away while the other was insensible, or it may have perished for want of that relief which the poor creature herself--helpless, terrified, distracted, despairing, and exhausted--may have been unable to afford to it. And yet it is certain, if the woman is found guilty under the statute, execution will follow. The crime has been too common, and examples are necessary. (200)

In either case, as Hardie the storytelling lawyer in Scott's novel states, the end of the story occurs when all is revealed, or when it is revealed that there is nothing to be revealed: "'The end of uncertainty' he concluded, "is the death of interest; and hence it happens that no one now reads novels" (24). Infanticide serves a purpose in narrative

only as long as it remains unexplained. Uncertainty will sell books; the heart of infanticide, like the Heart of Midlothian, should remain secret and impermeable to its readers. What Hardie locates as a specifically novelistic problem--the need to suspend the plot on untellable secrets--makes infanticide the perfect device to hang a plot on. To keep interest alive, perhaps, some babies must die mysteriously, sacrificed to the plot themselves for the sake of the novel.

For the law, the issue becomes not one of individual guilt or innocence but of the exemplarity of the punishment. It is not any specific instance of infanticide that interests the magistrate, but rather the generalized threat that hangs over the entire institution of motherhood. For, who knows how many other babies have been slaughtered unbeknownst to the watchful eyes of the law? The lawyers create the crime, inventing the story in its specific instances to protect against a more generalized, more pervasive crime, a lingering sense of which dwells in all families. Even though the prevalence of the crime represents a threat to all families, it also suggests that leniency be employed in the case of repentant mothers. What matters is the act of contrition or rather the spoken evidence of contrition. The perpetrator need not be punished so much as repent, and the crime is built into the nature of the story-telling task itself. The narrator links narrative to the law and to the way it is manipulated by the law:

> When the narrative was concluded, the cross-examination commenced, which it is a painful task even for the most candid witness to undergo, since a story, especially if connected with agitating and alarming incidents, can scarce be so clearly and distinctly told, but that some ambiguity and doubt may be thrown upon it by a string of successive and minute interrogatories. (155)

In the superstitious and enthusiastic prosecution of infanticide, the idea and the crime itself become so tangled that it is impossible to distinguish between them. To confuse matters even further, the distinction between the witness and the criminal blurs so that, as in "The Thorn," the narrative of infanticide seems to function as a mirror. The surface of Wordsworth's pond reveals the murdered baby's face to you, the poem's reader, putting the reader in the position of the child. In Scott's novel a similar mirroring effect occurs, as to believe a mother capable of infanticide is to admit that you yourself are capable of imagining the crime. To imagine is not so far from acting. as the tremendous power of the imagination to make the story is as powerful as the actuality of deed. If Wordsworth's reader identifies with the baby, Scott's must, on some level, either deny the mother's guilt or admit his or her own. Scott constructs a narrative where to admit the possibility of Effie's infanticide is to confess one's own desires. As Effie tells Jeanie, the real crime is not killing a child but being able to imagine it possible to kill one:

> "Ye are muckle to blame, lass if ye think a mother would, or could, murder her ain bairn--Murder?--I wad hae laid down my life just to see a blink o' its ee!"
>
> "I do believe," said Jeanie, "that ye are as innocent of sic a purpose as the new-born babe itsell."
>
> "I am glad ye do me that justice," said Effie haughtily; "it's whiles the faut of very good folk like you, Jeanie, that they think a' the rest of the warld as bad as the warst temptations can make them." (226)

As Saddletree remarks upon the defense lawyer's speech: "there's a chield can spin a muckle pirn out of wee tait of tow!" -- there's a young fellow who can spin a big story

out of a little bit of yarn. Both prosecution and defense are engaged in story-making and in each case there is little certainty at the core of the tale. Jeanie, unlike the lawyers, refuses to conceal concealment by lying. Effie's lawyer Fairbrother argues as best he can that the law itself is unfair and that "in all other cases" the first task of the prosecution is to prove that there has in fact been a crime. In fact, he says, not only can he not be sure of the death of the child, he cannot "even allow that there was evidence of its having ever lived." (254)

The inconsistency in the law allows it to convict a mother for murdering a child that it cannot prove existed. The chasm between the ballad and the law is most clearly delimited as a gap in mothering, a refusal to regard context. The ballads in Scott's novel appear as the insane and random ramblings of a lunatic, but contain hidden messages. When Madge sings a warning to Staunton that he is in danger of being ambushed, the song both reflects the thematic circumstances of Madge's own story and the specifics of the moment of its singing (193). Seemingly disassociated from meaning, when contextualized, ballads are more truthful than normal speech, which itself has the power to make false stories appear true.[5] Jeanie believes that language should represent reality and links speech to action, while the polyglot Madge is a hodgepodge of dialect and traditional ballad. Madge, unlike Jeanie, uses history as a weapon to conceal herself, reiterating the stories of others in ballads--they are not hers, at the same time as they belong only to her. The ubiquity of the ballad makes it a powerful way to convey messages, but also distinguishes the ballad from the novel.

---

[5] Carol Anderson's "The Power of Naming: Language, Identity and Betrayal in *The Heart of Midlothian*" in the collection *Scott in Carnival* (J. H. Alexander, ed) sees the difference between Jeanie and Madge as an issue of language.

Ballads depend upon a communal knowledge and it is in their familiarity that they are able to alert Robertson/Staunton to the specifics of the story. At the time of the writing of this novel, ballads had already passed as a method of transferring information. They identify Madge as both insane and anachronistic. The ballad's strength lies in simple repetition and the evocation of shared cultural experience. The novelist has a different task. Scott tells us, "The inventor of fictitious narratives has to rack his brains for means to diversify his tale, and after all can hardly hit upon characters or incidents which have not been used again and again...." (23) Madge's habit of peppering her speeches with old ballads produces a method of communication that signifies only if given the listener's familiarity with a small repertoire of plots. Employing this riddle-like mode, she sings to Jeanie, "My banes are buried in yon kirkyard." Shaw claims that Madge and Meg "recall the world of the Scots ballad" and that this world is already slipping beyond reach in the period in which the novel is set: Madge's madness, conventionally motivated by her seduction and betrayal at the hands of Staunton, may on the deepest level figure its marginality" (240).

Madge tells Jeanie that she is dead, that her ghost is "speaking now to thee," and that no one knows the difference between the living and the dead and between thinking and feeling. Speaking for the earlier world of balladry where the return of the wronged child to speak the mother's crime was a commonplace, Madge is an anachronism, bridging the gap between past and present, life and death, intellect and affect. Peter Brooks makes this connection between history and feeling, law and desire:

> It is the historicity of this fictionally originated desire--buried yet continuing as a filigree of design in the present, inhabiting a language that intends more than

> it says--history. One result is that language itself, as the agency of desire's insistence *toward* meaning, is in a state of displacement and fictionality, ever a mutilated naming or misnaming from which we must try to reconstruct what the name of the lost object might have signified. (279)

The incommensurability of law and desire becomes particularly evident to the female spectators who feel for Effie even as they assume that she is guilty. In their view the unfairness of her sentence lies in the social and legal structures which hang the women but ignore the men who have impregnated them--"writer-lads, prentice-lads, and what not" (260). The male interpretation is less universal and appears as genderless, tied only to the specifics of the historical circumstances which may give rise to universal sentences. Even in the contrasting view of the lawyer Saddletree, however, the flaw in the prosecution of this crime is that it is not based on universal issues of justice and injustice. Neither the status of women in society nor the status of Effie in particular has caused this problem but Scotland's condition in regard to England. It a story about not an actual female nor a general female body so much as the unfairness of the feminized and subservient nation. Infanticide arises more out of the masculine contingencies of politics than from sexual politics:

> "they speak about stopping the frequency of childmurder," said he, in a contemptuous tone; "do ye think our auld enemies of England...care a boddle whether we didna kill ane anither, skin and birn, horse and foot, man, woman, and bairns...Na, na, it's no *that* hinders them frae pardoning the bit lassie. ...The king and queen are sae ill pleased wi' that mistake about Porteous, that deil a kindly Scot will they pardon again..." (261)

The unfairness of Effie's sentence is that it cannot be circumvented because of its

historical location. Effie's relation at first appears determined merely by her presence in the jail at the same time as the Porteous mob's storming of that jail. Appearing initially as a metonymic link between Effie and the Porteous uprising, the proximity in place and time, the relation between the two--between historical fact and novelistic creation--is also determined in other ways. Saddletree remarks on the unfairness of a law that condemns Effie because it wants to punish all Scots for the Porteous uprising. Saddletree has however misread the circumstances. He does not realize that Staunton/Robertson in leading the uprising has intended to free his lover Effie. The historical is merely a disguise for the personal. By condemning Effie the law *has,* however mistakenly, punished Staunton the actual perpetrator. The letter of the law, purloined or otherwise, still in the words of Lacan "always arrives at its destination" (53). Staunton, ringleader of the mob uprising and father of two illegitimate sons, receives his own punishment. The child Effie didn't kill returns at the book's end to kill his own father. So parricide in the novel is not only rendered more palatable than infanticide and is admitted into the pages of the novel in a way that infanticide is not, but it goes unpunished. The father's punishment, however, occurs regardless of the law. If the Oedipal plot only proceeds because the identity of the father is concealed from the son, or because the son misreads his own father, then this misreading seems eminently more acceptable than the subplot of infanticide. For in the story of Oedipus, his parents', Laius and Jocasta's, willingness to commit infanticide rather than face their fate is similar to the self-involved behavior of Effie and Staunton. In both Scott's plot and the Oedipal story, infanticide gets the story going. It is the parents who begin the plot through attempts at ridding themselves of their offspring. As long as the family remains intact there is no story. If in the Oedipal plot there are

no strangers--only the appearance of strangers--in Scott's novel also familial entanglements provide the novel with its ending as everyone turns out to be related--in one way or another--to everyone else.

iv. Sewing Together

The infanticide plot arises out of an ever-shifting series of oppositions: uncertainty versus certainty, history versus superstition, novel versus ballad, truth versus falsehood, good mothering versus monstrosity, and civilization versus landscape. On one side is the nineteenth century and the desire for certainty; on the other is the chaotic and unreachable past. What happens before, like the pre-Oedipal stage of the infant's existence, remains unvoiceable, a source of both pleasure and anxiety. No sooner are the oppositions drawn than they begin to collapse, as uncertainty and certainty merge, and good mothering and bad mothering become one. Nancy Armstrong suggests a characteristic binary opposition, between angelic woman and monster: "the rhetorical power that was exercised through monstrous representations of women...came to play an especially powerful role in a discourse that redefined any form of political resistance as a form of individual pathology" (252). Infanticide, the monstrous, makes plot out of the disfunction, joining plot and context together so that there is only one way of seeing the world inside and outside of the text. Infanticide works to suture the text to the world outside. In the words of Kaja Silverman, the term "suture" refers to how the narrative "moves forwards and acts upon the viewer only through the constant intimation of something which has not

yet been fully seen, understood, revealed" (213). In other words, narration works through concealment. Suture forces the viewer to make the link between the world of the text and the world outside and implies the ability of one to change the other.[6] Maternal infanticide works in plots by juxtaposing the inside and the outside of the story. The story clearly depends upon the disruption of the idea of the good mother both as social reality and trope. The confusion between the actual, biological state of mothering and the textual mother is complete when the reader can only see mothers as either good or bad. Scott's intentional comment on law's mistaken reading of the mother as murderous when she is merely immoral, and the law's correctness in finding Meg guilty of murder even if ignorant of the true scope of her crimes, continues so that even as poor mad Madge is hanged for witchery, the lynching occurs through the actions of the mob and not legally. The law is right as often as it is wrong even if it generally arrives at the right criminal purely by chance and for all the wrong reasons.

The law errs so frequently because, as both tale and historical reality, infanticide exists at the limits of what we can know. Unprovable and untellable, child-murder, especially when enacted by the mother in early infancy, represents the perfect crime. The contest over the control of the coroner's office which raged between the competing representatives of law and medicine centered on issues of which discipline could devise an adequate system of recognition and punishment. The new class of lawyers and doctors, Laura Berry notes, vied for the post of the coroner and used "the very questionability of infanticide as grounds for their own identity as

---

[6] Ruthe Thompson made this connection clear to me in our e-mail correspondence.

professionals" (134).[7] They argued over who was most qualified to read the text of the infant corpse.

Presented by poet and novelist, infanticide brings forth another issue and another question of authorship. Wordsworth's sea captain could only superstitiously attempt to see truth in a tree because a trained professional, be he lawyer, doctor, or historian, would come to the grave, exhume the corpse and render an expert judgment upon it.[8] Both stillbirth and live birth presented a threat to professionals. Banished by doctors from the delivery room in the eighteenth century, midwives--the non-professional, female counterparts to obstetricians, and long associated with witchery and superstition--came to be regarded as co-conspirators in cases of infanticide.[9] Thus the only witnesses capable of narrating the story accurately were those trained in facts,

---

[7] In her unpublished manuscript, Berry traces a relation between the battle for the Middlesex coroner's office in the period after 1858 and the discourse of infanticide in Eliot's novel. In Berry's work she suggests that the difference between the medical goal of the eighteenth century and that of the nineteenth is that the earlier doctor was interested in proving the mother innocent. In the nineteenth century, Berry argues "child murder is sensationalized rather than sentimentalized." (152)

[8] Stephen Bann argues in *The Invention of History: Essays on the Representation of the Past* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990) that "an article of faith for the contemporary specialist in historical research is the assumption that before 1800 there were indeed historians, but only after that date does it become possible and necessary to speak of the *professional* historian (14). Bann relates history, medicine and law and quotes Marc Ferro in *L'Histoire sous surveillance* as saying that "the medical order, the scientific order and the historical order have conducted themselves in similar ways, which have resulted at the same time in the institutionalization of a profession and the establishment of a discipline" (15).

[9] Mary Poovey suggests that the threat that midwives posed to doctors was first that they deprived the medical establishment of a source of "tractable clinical material" and second that the woman's practice gave "birth" to modern obstetrics ("Scenes of an Indelicate Character": The Medical "Treatment" of Victorian Women." *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Eds, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. p 148)

even if they inevitably arrived at the scene of the crime belatedly.[10] Infanticide provides a fulcrum between the past and present. If the doctor is present, there will be no crime, for his witnessing will prevent it. If the doctor is absent, the crime will occur, but can only be read into the scene after the fact. The only witnesses are the criminals and the speechless child (doubly voiceless because he has not yet attained language and because he is dead). The only way to restore order and justice is to reconstruct the event out of its fragments. The primary evidence against the mother is her status as mother, and the meaning of mother is what provides the justification for her prosecution. Mothering means not so much to give birth successfully as to potentially cause the death of the child. Working backwards from effect to cause we can discern the definition of mother implies more than it denotes--the gap between the monstrous and angelic.

vi. Doubled Agency

---

[10] Joyce Egginton's compelling journalistic account of infanticide in the present day, *From Cradle to Grave: The Short Lives and Strange Deaths of Marybeth Tinning's Nine Children* recounts a rather fascinating study conducted by Dr. Roy Meadow, professor of pediatrics and child health at St. James's University Hospital, Leeds, mothers suspected of infanticide were subjected to the scrutiny of hidden cameras:

> Women suspected of multiple infanticide have been put into test situations, left alone with their babies in hospital rooms while, unknown to them, their actions were observed and photographed, always with medical staff on hand to rescue the babies if necessary (349).

This strange experiment, an attempt to plumb the secrets of infanticide with panoptical methodology demonstrates how much the plot of infanticide is put into place, authorized, inspired by the hospital authorities themselves who engineer the visible proof even while risking a child's health.

The doubleness of femininity divides the novel between different kinds of mothers and breaks it again into different types of sisters. The prosecuting lawyer recognizes this division, insisting that one sister is a murderer and the other represents the highest in virtue, but he makes evil the effect of goodness:

> he was sorry to observe, that it was females who possessed the world's good report, and to whom it was justly valuable, who were most strongly tempted, by shame and fear of the world's censure, to the crime of infanticide: That the child was murdered, he professed to entertain no doubt. The vacillating and inconsistent declaration of the prisoner herself, marked as it was by numerous refusals to speak the truth on subjects, when, according to her own story, it would have been natural, as well has advantageous, to have been candid...left no doubt in his mind as to the fate of the unhappy infant. (253)

All females are to some degree responsible for infanticide. The good mother is as culpable in the crime as the bad one.

Although Scott's plot rests upon the falseness of the accusation against Effie Deans and upon Jeanie Deans's heroic actions in appealing to known historical figures for help, what remains inexplicable is that even though Effie's innocence remains assured throughout, it exists only at the price of another mother's guilt. As long as there is a guilty mother--Margaret--there can also be an innocent one. The plot's impetus depends upon the difference between the accusation of infanticide and the truth. Unnecessarily, this plot contains an actual infanticide and, even more strangely, both the victim of the false infanticide, the Whistler, Effie's son, and the actual murdered child, the unnamed and murdered son of Madge, are the sons of Robert Staunton. To prove Effie innocent of murder one need not produce a guilty mother,

only a living child, yet Scott produces the child and thus it is not necessary to additionally provide a guilty mother. Meg's murder of Madge's child is rendered even more superfluous to the plot by the fact that Effie is not only innocent of the crime but of the crime that has never occurred.

Scott, while calling attention to the potential for infanticide to be falsified, cannot deny the fear of it, and so moves constantly between two ideas of motherhood, one civilized and the other wild. The story rests at the same time on the opposition between vindictive and nurturing mothers, but seems to be divided as to what constitutes the natural inclination of a mother. While Effie does not kill her child by Robert Stanton, Madge Wildfire's son has been murdered by Wildfire's mother, Meg Murdockson, a woman referred to by many names, among them "Hecate" and "Mother Blood." Meg is judged despite "her wretched appearance and violent demeanor" to have maternal feelings. Her appearance of wildness provides the counter to Effie's euphemistic evocation of civility. Where Effie presents the picture of a fine London lady, Meg seems to represent a much deeper maternal feeling. The magistrate in Meg's trial draws a comparison between different varieties of mothers that could easily be Meg and Effie. He feels sympathy for "the justice of her argument, that her [Meg's] child might be as dear to her as to a more fortunate and amiable mother" (203). The kind of maternal care that makes a woman go to extraordinary lengths to protect her child also causes Jeanie Deans to embark on her heroic quest for her younger sister. At the same time, maternal feeling motivates the actions of Meg Murdockson to kill her grandchild and conceal the fate of Effie's baby.[11]

---

[11] Gillian M. Dale discusses how Carol Gilligan's theories might be applied to the decision made by Jeanie. ("Jeanie Deans, the 'Heart' of *Midlothian* and Feminist Ethical

It is maternal feeling, in other words, which provokes nearly all of "Mother Blood's" behavior. She had been the surrogate mother for George Staunton, the father of both babies. The relation to Staunton explains why Meg is willing to let the innocent Effie hang while Staunton goes free:

> "I have nursed him at this withered breast," answered the old woman, folding her hands on her bosom, as if pressing an infant to it, "and though he has proved an adder to me--though he has been the destruction of me and mine--though he has made me company for the devil, if there be a devil, and food for hell, if there be such a place, yet I cannot take his life--No, I cannot," she continued.... "Na, na--he was the first bairn I ever nurst--ill I had been--but man can never ken what woman feels for the bairn she has held first to her bosom!" (317)

Here she links the act of breast feeding to her venom and to her nurturing impulses, even though the more venomous act was that of the "adder" at her breast, George Staunton. The same willingness to let Effie rather than George suffer inspires Meg to lie about Madge's role in the disappearance of Effie's child. She is the mother who will do anything to protect her own interests and the interests of her children. The nurturing she provides by protecting her young becomes evil when it turns unnaturally against a world that she perceives as a threat to her offspring. In this way the mother

---

Theory" in *Scott in Carnival*, J. H. Alexander, ed). Jeanie's refusal to lie, which Scott says was exhibited that Helen Walker, the actual model for Jeanie, arose, not because of lack of feeling, but out of high principles. Dale's essay ignores the other side of motherhood in the novel and like Carol Gilligan and Sara Ruddick (*Maternal Thinking*, New York, Ballentine: 1989) assumes that mother's feelings towards her child will automatically be generalized into a love of humanity.

is implicitly a threat to the order of law. Law and order, associated with the paternal and related to language, can be seen in opposition to a maternal, prelinguistic privileging of relationship over rules. Rather than necessarily arising naturally out of the act of mothering, this evil could be read as a result of the way that the practice of wetnursing perverts the natural. As wetnurse to George Staunton, Meg performs the part of mother and develops affections for him that can never be reciprocated because of the class differences between them. The act of breast-feeding becomes an economic transaction and further highlights the tension between natural and social:

> She [the wet nurse] is like the prostitute in that she sells her body, or its product, for profit and her client's satisfaction; but, unlike, the prostitute, she sells her body for a virtuous cause. She is at once a mother--seconde mere, remplacant--and an employee. She is performing one of woman's "natural" functions, but she is performing it as work, for pay, in a way that is eminently not natural but overtly social in its construction. (Nochlin, 45)

Meg's attachment to George strangely precedes her attachment to her own biological child Madge. He is "the first bairn" and no man understands that attachment even though for Meg to perform the duties of wetnurse to George means that she has put aside her own child. The milk that by nature was Madge's went to George and he has taken priority over her own child. In her role as wetnurse she develops an excessive attachment to him which makes her want her own daughter to form a union with him. This not quite incestuous match between Madge and her mother's first "bairn" subsequently leads to Madge's pregnancy. In a sense, then, Meg is at fault for Madge's seduction because she has put the idea in Madge's mind. Meg, hoping to make all come to right, kills the infant evidence of her daughter's corruption. Later

believing that Madge has mimicked her own actions, Meg imagines that Madge has killed Effie's child. Believing that Madge is guilty of infanticide, Meg is willing to let Effie hang rather than expose her own daughter to prosecution: "When it was asked what possible interest she could have in exposing the unfortunate girl to suffer for a crime she had not committed, she asked, if they thought she was going to put her own daughter into trouble to save another?" (500).

In the final scenes of the novel, Effie Deans's son, the Whistler, returns to participate in the murder of his own father in a strangely contorted Oedipus-like ending for the novel. His return does not so much provide us the empirical proof of Effie Deans's innocence as call forth an unanswerable demand for more explanation. His entry into the plot seems extraneous and disruptive. He intrudes into Jeanie's scene of domesticity and by his presence there transforms her home into a prison, forcing her to free him just as years before she freed his mother. As a returning victim, he reflects the other side of the happy family that Jeanie has created around herself and makes quite clear the boundaries of her domesticity. As Bruce Beiderwell notes, "the ends of the more typical, 'happier' Waverley novels generally convey something unsatisfying" and are "reminiscent of the prison" (122). The Whistler's murder of his own father suggests a relation between the murder of the father by the son who escaped infanticide, but also suggests the connects the Oedipal drama to the claustrophobia of Jeanie's new life uprooted from her ancestral home and planted in her new bourgeois house. Jeanie's role as the one who feels sympathy for the Whistler and enables his escape and his subsequent removal to America places her, like all mothers, on the side that favors the individual child over the abstract law. It is she who sees the Whistler as a child rather than a murderer and thus cannot allow him to

be hanged. The Whistler's fate away from Scotland is told in a few sentences. He is a slave, a freedman, and then the murderer of his "inhuman master." He takes up with a tribe of "wild indians" with whom he lives an unrecorded life in the manner of "savage people" (538). The Whistler is consistently set up as outside the law and history. Although the Whistler is purportedly Effie's returning son, it seems clear that he bears more than a passing resemblance to Madge Wildfire. If Madge Wildfire's son is alive, then perhaps poor barren Effie is more guilty than she appears. Scott's plot punishes her even as it situates her in the impossible position of the childless mother.

v. Landscape, Infanticide, History

As Jeanie and Madge Wildfire walk through the woods--"a variegated hillock of wild flowers and moss, such as the poet of Grasmere has described in his verses on "The Thorn,"-- the return to the scene of the crime of Wordsworth's poem in Scott's novel causes Madge to scream and to fling herself down on the ground weeping. "I canna shed tears but maybe anes or twice a year, and I have come to wet this turf with them, that the flowers may grow fair, and the grass may be green." Having taken Jeanie to the grave of her murdered child, Madge tries to tell her the story, thereby jogging Jeanie's memory of giving food to a crazy young woman years in the past. This woman coincidentally was Madge Wildfire who now out of gratitude is willing to exchange that act of charity for the gift of a story. Unable to keep herself to one place, in either the story or the landscape, Madge keeps walking away from the spot and also straying from her tale so that "Jeanie endeavoured to bring her back to the confessional," the spot where the baby lies. The confession is not of Madge's own

murder of the baby, but of the actions of her mother, Meg Murdockson: "she pat it away in below the bit of bourock of turf yonder, just to be out o' the gate; and I think she buried my best wits with it, for I have never been just mysell since."[12] Jeanie's first introduction to the crazed Madge Wildfire and Meg Murdockson described as "the very picture of Hecate" (311) is tied explicitly to the landscape.

At Muschat's Cairn, Jeanie meets with Robertson/Staunton, her sister's seducer. "The ominous and hallowed spot" is the site of a grisly murder and sets this tone of history embedded in scenery. Scott again makes sure to inform his reader of the difference between the historic past and the present of the narration. In the past, the power of witchcraft and demonology on the imagination held sway, but these beliefs have dissipated. Scott is certain that the reader does not ascribe to the beliefs which at one time had been

> believed in by almost all ranks, but more especially among the stricter classes of presbyterians, whose government, when their party were at the head of the state, had been much sullied by their eagerness to inquire into and persecute these imaginary crimes. (165)

The reading of novels has replaced the belief in superstitions, just as novels have replaced ballads and broadsides. The reading of novels has rendered the gaps in landscape bridgeable. Fiction negotiates with landscape and history, controlling them and bringing them into an understandable and tellable form.

---

[12] Wordsworth's Martha Ray and Madge are both linked to a loss of rationality:

Sad case for such a brain to hold
Communion with a stirring child!
Sad case, as you may think, for one
Who had a brain so wild!

Much as the Wordsworthian landscape recalls stories of violence and murder, in Scott the power of rural scenery to evoke stories is related to the history of place. Stories also have the power to change an interpretation of landscape, but only proleptically. In a note to Chapter VIII, Scott draws attention to the real existence of landscape described by his narrator at great length as so beautiful that "the effect approaches near to *enchantment*" [emphasis mine] (167). He mentions in this same note the effect of his writing on the landscape. Since the publication of his book, Scott informs us, the formerly impassable section of landscape has been improved by "a beautiful and solid pathway...formed around these romantic rocks." It is not enough that the steps have enhanced the natural beauty of the area; Scott makes sure that we know that it is this very book and this very passage that we are reading that has led to the change: "the author has the pleasure to think that the passage in the text gave rise to the undertaking" (87). The reader is drawn outside the story towards the real existence of landscape which proves the story true by its strangeness and by the fact that it has been altered by the story's presence. His book has caused a pathway to be made around the rocks and inside his book he draws attention to this fact that words have had the power to alter the natural world outside the book. This gesturing outside of the text directs the reader then back into the text so that both the land and the story seem to share one life. Scott blurs the distinction between fact and fiction and between nature and language so that it is as if words, specifically Scott's words, rather than human hands, have altered landscape.

History, which makes Scott's task as novelist difficult, makes Madge's identity easier: he struggles for diversity and she uses the lack of it to hide herself. In order to make his novel interesting he must try to tell a story that has never been told. To

remain safely inconspicuous Madge tries to avoid speaking of herself, echoing only the old choruses of well-known ballads. Of course in the end, she is hanged and it becomes clear that history has passed her by, while he sells many books and succeeds not only in conquering landscape, but in buying it. Scott's purchase of the actual door of the prison of Midlothian for use in his mansion, Abbotsford, cements story and history with concrete materials. In a reversal of the kind of move that underpins the novel with historical evidence, Scott creates a story that gives the evidence its meaning. Again cause and effect are reversed so that one cannot determine what comes first. Through a footnote that refers to how the world outside his story has been effected by his story, and making the door of his mansion (bought with the profits from his book) the door in his novel, Scott confuses the past with present, and fact with fiction.

Chapter Four

Two Lips Speaking As One:
Hetty Sorrel's Passionate, Passionless Lips

i. The Pre-Existing Plot: Eliot and Wordsworth

> "I came to a place where there was lots of chips and turf, and I sat down on the trunk of a tree to think what I should do. And all of a sudden I saw a hole under the nut-tree, like a little grave. And it darted into me like lightning--I'd lay the baby there, and cover it with the grass and the chips. I couldn't kill it any other way . . ."
>
> George Eliot

Throughout *Adam Bede* (1859) George Eliot borrows from William Wordsworth, and, on occasion, from Walter Scott. The insistence on the primacy of feeling, the collapsing of human subjectivity into the description of landscape, and the

emphasis on the telling of the story over the content of the tale itself--all echo Wordsworthian concerns. It is not insignificant that Eliot situated her 1859 novel in 1798, the year of the publication of *Lyrical Ballads.* Her epigraph comes from Wordsworth, and Eliot herself had written upon reading Wordsworth, "I've never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could like them . . ." (Letter of 22 November, 1839). Wordsworth receives explicit mention when Arthur Donnithorne gives his godmother a copy of *Lyrical Ballads.* Donnithorne, whose thoughtless seduction of Hetty Sorrel will bring about her pregnancy, says, " . . . I've got a book I meant to bring you, godmamma. It came down in a parcel from London the other day. I know you are fond of queer, wizard-like stories. It's a volume of poems, "Lyrical Ballads": most of them seem to be twaddling stuff . . . ." (65) Despite Donnithorne's dismissive attitude to the volume, Eliot's incorporation of the *Lyrical Ballads* into her own text signals a rewriting of Wordsworth's thematics of motherhood, childhood, and infanticide. In Eliot's version of the story Martha Ray, the pathetic madwoman by the pond, becomes Hetty Sorrel, a narcissistic, beautiful, and depraved creature. Although Arthur is the character in the novel who makes the most direct reference to Wordsworth, Hetty, the woman he impregnates, is the one who acts out "The Thorn."

In "The Thorn," which was drawn from an Old Scottish ballad entitled "The Cruel Mother," the "heap of earth o'ergrown with moss" prompts the narrative of infanticide. In Eliot, landscape does not so much provoke the story, as precede both

the recounting of the story *and* the actions within the story. Landscape thus achieves the status of text and holds within it the inspiration for action.[1] The landscape in Wordsworth's poem only suggests the story to the sea captain; it does not provoke the act itself. Although it is possible that the infanticide in "The Thorn" exists in the sea captain's mind, there is no actual infanticide that occurs because of the story; the boundary between the reality of the world and the telling of the story remains. Eliot's twist on Wordsworth's plot confuses action and re-action. Eliot situates her novel in the Romantic era and the narrative moves between evocations of her two predecessors. Janice Carlisle suggests that Wordsworth's influence dominates over Scott's and links *Adam Bede* directly to Wordsworth's *The Excursion, The Prelude,* and most directly, to "The Thorn" (188). For Carlisle, Eliot's tie to the Romantic poet goes beyond the thematic. "The scenes and figures of 'The Thorn'--the muddy pond, the mossy grave, and the woman in the scarlet cloak," writes Carlisle, "exert their power," but it is the way that the story progresses, rather than simply its ingredients that mark it as Wordsworthian (191). Eliot's manner "is essentially that of Wordsworth's sea captain responding to the suggestion of infanticide" (192). Hard questions and the difficulty in relying on inconsistent emotional outpourings push both narrators into a reliance on

---

[1]In her novel Eliot incorporates aspects of both Wordsworth and Scott. "Coincident with Eliot's association of detail and realism is a competing association of detail and romance drawn" from Scott (Langbauer, 206). Eliot saw herself in the line of these two Romantics and has been considered by critics as the "most Wordsworthian of English novelists (Knoephmacher, 17). Yet the more prosaic moments of her novel, the places where plot proceeds, are seen as the inheritance from Scott. Stang connects the two suggesting that Eliot's method is "identical" to that of Lyrical Ballads: "familiar material is transformed by the imagination so that in some way it has the effect of fantasy (166)"

hearsay. Eliot, like Wordsworth, "suggest[s] that superstition is the common response to . . . baffling questions" (Carlisle 193). Carlisle also suggests that Eliot has replaced Scott's distance from his characters with Wordsworth's "proximity" (194). [2] But the conventionality of the story can be linked more to Scott's influence than to Wordsworth's Carlisle argues.

Hetty's suggestion that the idea for infanticide comes to her from outside--darting "into me like lightning"-- underlines the pre-existence of the particular configuration of earth. This mound of earth already resembles a grave prior to her action. Hetty's concealment--the feminine tendency towards secretiveness which has characterized her behavior throughout the novel--creates her crime, but only out of texts. Contradicting Adam Bede's claim that texts are not as important as feelings and Dinah's suggestion that words can never be equal to feelings, Hetty's feelings are dictated to her by texts. In Hetty's telling of her story, infanticide is inspired by a peculiarity of landscape. The landscape bears the resemblance to a grave *before*, rather than because of, Hetty's act.[3] In Hetty's story the infant's cry follows her until

---

[2] Carlisle suggest however that the excursus of chapter 17 is more like Scott and reveals Eliot's desire to distance her self before she moves on in the story (199). The dialogue between narrator and character seems to however recall some of the techniques employed in Lyrical Ballads. (200). For a discussion of Wordsworth's use of proximity which differs from Carlisle's see Karen Swann's discussion of "The Ruined Cottage" cited in Chapter Two.

[3]In this way one of Ian Watt's key definers of realism in fiction, causality, is disrupted. Rather than one thing leading to another, "past experience" causing "present action," in Hetty's case the present action is caused by experiences she never had. For Watt "The novel's plot is also distinguished from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences" (22).

she returns to the scene of her crime. Hetty's decision to kill her child seems to be a foregone conclusion and what she speaks of is not the decision to kill but the fact that she can only kill her child in this way. She feels that she has no choice but to follow in the Wordsworthian tradition of baby-murder. Echoing the language of "The Thorn" where the "beauteous heap, a hill of moss" is also "like an infant's grave in size,/As like as like could be," Hetty's confession varies significantly from the tone set by the rest of the novel. What does it mean that Hetty does not act, but re-enacts?

Hetty attempts to find the setting of the tree, pond, and mound of earth in *The Heart of Midlothian* and "The Thorn," so that she can stage another version of the same story. In Eliot's revision, the confessor and its audience are both female. When Hetty tells Dinah her story in the prison cell, Eliot reveals a portion left unspoken by Scott and Wordsworth. Eliot's novel represents a merging of Wordsworth's concern for common people and an evocation of a reality grounded in the dailiness of the "middling" hero from Scott's historical novel.[4] In all three texts there is a curious collapse of the inside of the story and the world outside of the text which is complicated by a tension between the individual and the exterior landscape.

The landscape that preoccupies Wordsworth's sea captain seduces Hetty into her infanticide plot. The pregnant Hetty enters the countryside as she goes in search of Donnithorne in the chapter entitled "The Journey in Hope." Hetty seems to spend

---

[4] As Knoeflmacher suggests "Scott, too, professes to be a "realist" in the role of historian" (121) Scott's believe in justice allow shim to forgive Effie Deans in a way that Eliot cannot forgive Hetty.

as much time seeking an appropriate pond in which to drown herself as she does looking for Donnithorne. The place that Hetty finally arrives is the same place as in "The Thorn" and the mysterious, haunting landscape of *The Heart of Midlothian.* In the Scantlands she finds "a dark shrouded pool" (372) but resists jumping into it. As she by the pool shudders "at the dark cold," she begins to plan her escape from her engagement to Adam while recognizing the restrictions of her pregnancy. As Hetty walks she confuses the actual landscape with her mental picture. Failing to find Arthur, she journeys onwards in the following chapter, "The Journey in Despair": "Fancying herself at the edge of a hidden pool . . . wondering if it were very painful to be drowned" (391). She continues her journey, hoping "she might find just the sort of pool she had in her mind" (392). When she does finally find one, Hetty considers the pool in terms of its capacity to conceal: "The pool had its wintry depth now: by the time it got shallow, as she remembered the pools did at Hayslope, in the summer, no one could find out that it was her body . . . " (393). But Hetty does not drown herself. Instead she falls asleep, and upon awakening goes on in search of comfort and shelter. She finds a fleeting "passionate love of life" and is happy that she has not killed herself. What appears initially as a redemptive moment, however, is actually Hetty's passage into madness. Life and death seem to blur into one for her: "it was a dread to which she felt chained, from which she shrank and shrank as she did from the black pool, and yet could find no refuge from it" (397).

The narrative follows from Hetty until she gives birth, but never describing the

scene of the birth itself. At the crucial moment the narrative shifts from Hetty to Adam. The moment of birth and murder are avoided as the story becomes one of Adam's attempts to retrace Hetty's footsteps. In a sense, Adam follows Hetty following Wordsworth. The narrator can only follow to a certain point and can never reveal what happens between the two journeys--childbirth and child-murder--which lie at the center of the story. It is almost as if the narrative cannot accommodate such content. Adam can never discover for himself what has occurred. When Hetty's act is told to him he refuses to believe it. Just as Wordsworth and Scott reserved a portion of their story, Eliot holds back a piece as well. Instead, the birth of the child and the recovery of its body are relayed through the contradictory testimony of witnesses at Hetty's trial. Hetty, herself, never speaks of giving birth, although in her confession she reveals the details of the child's death in a language of intensely felt impressions punctuated by dashes and ellipses.

In Hetty's case, the story of a child's murder emerges from the mother rather than from a child. Paradoxically, the story of child murder seems to have occurred prior to the birth of the child, at least as a story. The idea of infanticide exists in Hetty's mind in pregnancy--predetermined even by the name of her lover, Donni*thorne*. "The Thorn" occupies the central moment, or perhaps more appropriately, the central *space* in a Romantic articulation of the connection between feelings and speech--between the presumed "natural" state of emotion and the achieved condition of language. In both "The Thorn" and *Adam Bede,* emotion is

always presented at a delay, filtered through, and limited by, language. Hetty's confession expresses a different sense of this same relation. In the earlier plot, retrieval of narrative from landscape is accomplished by the sea captain, an observer, but not a participant in the plot. The sea captain may have his own stake in the retelling of the tale, and the story he tells may well illustrate the problems of subjective interpretations by first person narrators; nevertheless, the sea captain does not directly narrate the story of maternal infanticide as his own experience. This is one story a man can never tell, as the only part he can play is that of the child who has been denied speech. Unlike the sea captain, Hetty comes upon a landscape already delineated by Wordsworth and acts to reenact Wordsworth's plot. She is not the first one there, and her actions when she arrives there were already done before her. The confession, the only moment in the novel where Hetty really speaks, is also the place where the harshness of Eliot's depiction of Hetty relents. Although she acts as the first person narrator of this scene and is a central actor within it, Hetty seems to have almost no control over what occurs. Thus Hetty's only saving grace arises out of her powerlessness and her lack of agency in murdering the child. Like the mothers in Victorian infanticide trials, her escape from censure is predicated upon her abdication of power.

If both Scott and Wordsworth rest a portion of their narrative on what cannot be told, Eliot emphasizes a new aspect of the story, when her disgraced woman speaks and confesses to her crime. There is no doubt now as to whether there has been an

infanticide, who has committed the crime, or even how the crime was committed. Eliot's explicit concern is whether or not Hetty ought to be forgiven. Although Hetty receives little in the way of sympathy from Eliot throughout the novel, it seems clear that the trauma of her pregnant search for Arthur and the scene of confession redeem her at least partially in the eyes of the narrator. Eventually she dies on her journey back to England.

Instead of focussing as earlier infanticide stories did on undecidability, Eliot's novel emphasizes the extraction of a confession. The focus on speaking as the only means to achieving expiation makes the exchange of a text for a child--something evident in Wordsworth--even more explicit in Eliot. Hetty's speech replaces the near meaninglessness of Martha Ray's "Oh, misery" and Madge Wildfire's nearly senseless invocation of ballad in Scott's novel with complete sentences and an understandable, coherent narrative. This progression to narrative, however, emerges in the center of Eliot's realistic text as a deviation from its earlier story, and is labeled as an alien birth within the novel. Dinah calls Hetty's story the "accursed thing" that ought not be kept inside and echoes her own assertion that her speech emerges from her without her conscious control over it. Dinah invokes the Lord on Hetty's behalf, asking, "Make her dread to keep the accursed thing within her soul (433)." While Hetty is bound to bring forth her confession, the story itself is a dreadful one. The "accursed thing" within Hetty seems to echo Hetty's own feeling about the child she has carried inside her. The child and the enclosed narration mimic each other's passage from inside to

outside, as Eliot releases the story of infanticide into the novel as a whole. Now Hetty must bring forth the story of what was once within her and is now dead and buried. The narrator whose voice and moral vision has previously governed so much of the novel relinquishes control as Hetty's confession takes over briefly in Chapter 45, "In the Prison."

The importance of confession lies in the shift from the truthful (or attempt at truthful) recounting of the narrator to the ramblings of the incoherent mother, thus highlighting a shift in the narration itself. Hetty's voice intrudes on a narration that has most often been designated as male by critics. The move from the ironic and moralizing voice of the narrator to the subjective perception of one of the characters in the novel seems to relate to the way in which maternal subjectivity is represented or rather, perhaps, not fully represented. Confession tells the truth and yet veers abruptly from the style of the remainder of the supposedly realist novel. The confession, which differs so in its style and content, becomes a way of seeing the novel's seeming resolution as a question rather than an answer. As Jill Matus states in her reading of the novel, "The confession focuses on issues of subjectivity and relationship and has an important bearing on what makes a mother (168)." The novel's confessional center then expresses a lapse in its style as a whole; realism cannot express infanticide and must resort instead to a subjective voice. Hetty Sorrel speaks of her bad mothering, but is the only woman permitted to voice such feelings throughout the book. The way in which these feelings are expressed seems far removed from the rest of the novel.

The narrator cannot make sense out of maternal infanticide and must allow Hetty to speak it herself. In all other descriptions of mothers, the narrator controls the depiction and eventually forces Dinah, Hetty's double, into silence.

In Eliot's novel, as in Scott's before her, the most unforgivable aspect of infanticide is not the act of murder so much as the refusal to speak of maternity. Wordsworth's poem differs significantly from the novel in that the woman never speaks and is never given the option to express herself beyond the purely emotional exhortation. Martha Ray's silence is, however, central to the telling of the story and it is because of her silence that the sea captain must create his version of the infanticide tale. Arthur and Hetty and Adam refuse to express themselves in words throughout the novel. For Eliot, the lips that do not reveal are sinning lips, even as their silence generates plot. If Arthur had confessed his feelings towards Hetty to Irwine in Chapter Sixteen as he had intended, he would have been forced to give up his flirtation. Arthur, instead, sees his "confession to the Rector" as a "serious annoyance" (176). Similarly, if Adam had spoken earlier he might have been disabused of his misplaced affection for Hetty. Dinah, the only one of the main characters who speaks freely at the novel's outset has been silenced by its end. As the others learn their lessons and acquire speech, Dinah loses her voice. While Adam and Arthur achieve manhood, Dinah becomes a silent mother and Hetty a dead one. In Eliot's novel, as in Wordsworth's poem and Scott's novel, the silence of the mother is a central and essential requirement. The silencing of the cousins Hetty and Dinah points

to how the doubling in the novel does not allow a viable way for a woman to have a voice and become a mother. While Hetty does speak it is only at the cost of her child. Dinah gives up her voice in order to become a mother. It seems that mothers cannot speak, or if they do speak, they speak like Mrs. Poyser of domestic things.

ii. Two Lips

> "The greatest benefit we owe to the artist... is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is part from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment."
>
> George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856)

> ". . . you said once as women wouldna ha' been a bad invention if they'd all been like Dinah."
>
> "I meant her voice, man--I meant her voice, that was all," said Bartle. "I can bear to hear her speak without wanting to put wool in my ears. As for other things, I daresay she's like the rest o' the women-- (536)"
>
> *Adam Bede*

Reading Dinah and Hetty as part of the same story rather than as depictions of individuals, the reader finds a story torn between motherhood and authorship. There are thus two ways (at least) to look at *Adam Bede*. The reader who sees the novel as the mirror of life may have trouble with the ending, unless this generous reader believes whole-heartedly in married bliss and domestic joy. A reader whose experience of such differs, a reader who has perhaps actually experienced either motherhood or marriage outside of the pages of a book, may quibble with or question the final chapter. Any reader who has taken seriously the words of Eliot's narrator earlier in the novel will question the probability of the same narrator who has consistently questioned happy endings finally presenting us with one. The narrator has not appeared as a generous reader of nature, but rather a questioning one, and has already told us to view happy endings with suspicion: "if you would love a woman without ever looking back on your love as a folly, she must die while you are courting her; and if you would maintain the slightest belief in human heroism, you must never make a pilgrimage to see the hero (186)."

Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick sees the happily-ever-after ending of the novel as a story of forced silences and of silenced women. In Sedgwick's reading, Dinah's relinquishing of her career and embrace of Adam moves her "from a position of relative power and independence in a loose relation to an agriculture-based extended family, to a much more circumscribed position as mother of an intensively gendered bourgeois nuclear family (146)." As Sally Shuttleworth contends, the contradiction

between the "initial recognition that Hetty's plight was, in part, a direct consequence of social stratification is late suppressed (44)." In the end, Hetty's tragedy "seems to stem less from the inequities of social organization than from the limitations of her own nature" (45). Thus, Dinah's final understanding of her place in the world rings more of finality than of understanding. In this sense the realistic text is perhaps most realistic when it is acting like a romance and ignoring the darker side of the story it tells. The problem that the novel represents unproblematically at its final point is the silence of Dinah and the disproportionate castigation Hetty suffers compared to Arthur.

Eliot's portrait of landscape is neither completely realistic nor completely idealistic. The pastoral beauty of Hayslope occupies a pole directly opposed to the urban wasteland of Thornfield. Like the tension between an idealistic view and a realistic one, this dichotomy suggests a middle path that cannot quite be perceived. Landscape appears rather secretive like the nature Eliot presents in *Felix Holt* where the "thorn-bushes" have "human histories hidden" inside them. Poised between Hayslope and Snowfield, between the dairy and the factory, the novel imitates the slide of one world into another. What appears as natural landscape to one reader, to another is the story of infanticide.[5] The tension between Eliot's morality and her

---

[5]Critics who read this novel as realist pause before the notorious didacticism of "Chapter Seventeen" unable to account for its position. While discussing realism the narrator interrupts the novel's progress to directly addresses the reader. Paradoxically this interruption uncovers the operation of the novel as a written story and disrupts its realism (cite Levine).

realism makes the novel proceed in a double voice: "A*dam Bede* is hardly free from the serious difficulties which this philosophical novelist met throughout her career in her desire to be faithful to two essentially opposed criteria of truth" (Knoepflmacher 117). The novel straddles a Wordsworthian goal of representing real people through detailed evocation of their lives and a desire to end with the neatly-sewn marriage of Adam and Dinah, a marriage which excludes all others, most notably Hetty. The ending leaves us with an awkward sense that an ugly truth has been pushed aside.

Arthur Donnithorne suggests that reality isn't as important as desire: "'I don't think a man ought to be blamed so much if he is betrayed into doing things in that way, in spite of his resolutions'"(175). In Donnithorne's mind his own attempts to avoid Hetty's charms ought to count as much as his actions in succumbing to them; his words or intentions matter as much as his deeds. Hetty herself, however, is as repelled by words as by actions. Hetty is pure and, seemingly, her landscape has no self in it at all: "Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her" (156). Arthur's embrace of Hetty similarly has no history it: "He may be a shepherd in Acadia for aught he knows, he may be the first youth kissing the first maiden," (138) but only a few pages later he knows that there is "something bitter" (138) in the "fountain of sweets" (139). The division of idealism is expressed quite directly as a "parting" which occurs along class lines as well as generic ones; for he knows that "...there could be nothing but the misery of parting, after all. No gentleman, out of a ballad could marry a farmer's niece (140)." Arthur, in a novel, cannot marry Hetty and his particular situation defines the

general plot of the ballad where love can conquer their division. A doubling occurs within the content of the novel as well as in the novel's manner of depicting. The stylistic variations within the book suggest a more pervasive and complex sort of doubling than simply that of characters.[6] Similarly, the doubled nature of the two cousins Hetty and Dinah, one "unmindful" and the other thoughtful and prophetic, one infanticidal and the other nurturing, come to represent "incomplete halves" of the same person (Knoefpflmacher 118). In addition, the book has two endings, Hetty's and Dinah's. The narrator has even suggested early on that such happy endings only occur in books. [7]

Before the scene of confession Hetty and Dinah also appear literally and figuratively side by side as they will later in the prison. Prior to Hetty's seduction, although not before she has attached her fantasies to Arthur Donnithorne, the two cousins prepare for bed in their adjoining bedrooms. Placing the two women in mirroring spaces--parallel bedrooms--Eliot manipulates time. By describing what the characters look *at*, rather than what they look *like*, Eliot positions them in relation to the world and places the reader in the same position as the character. For Carlisle this envisioning invites the reader "to feel as well as to see the reality of the character's

---

[6] Jill Matus remarks upon another doubling. Chad's Bess represents vanity and the love of finery while Ted's Bess stands in a doorway nursing her child..

[7] The narrator's relation to reality is also doubled as he both instantiates himself as a realistic documenter of real people and real events while never denying the problematic status of making such an assertion. George Levine has claimed that such a undermining of reality and disruption of it, is actually characteristic of the realist novel. So while the narrator engages in one sort of double-voicedness on the level of depiction, relating a story that cannot be told, the structure of the novel creates another on the level of plot.

experience (195)." Showing what the two characters see, Eliot's narrator situates the reader in the same place as the characters to share their vision. The mirror indicates all of Hetty's narcissistic self-consciousness and the window all of Dinah's moral outwardness. What Dinah sees reminds her of other people and not simply of uninhabited scenery:

> but she thought little of leaving the mere scene, for, to her, bleak Snowfield had just as many charms: she thought of all the dear people whom she had learned to care for among these peaceful fields, and who would now have a place in her loving remembrance forever. (159)

When Hetty looks in the mirror, the narrator's emphasis is not on what she sees or feels but on the superficiality of the reflection itself, suggesting that Hetty is all surface. As she gazes at herself, Hetty's perceptions seem always filtered through the admiring glances of others and told without her own entrance into the description: "How pretty the little puss looks..." (154). While Dinah sees the world through herself and through her emotional contact with it, Hetty's thoughts and feelings do not emerge from within her, but are formed of the outside as if they were the thoughts and feelings not of a woman but of "every man" (154): "Every man under such circumstances is conscious of being a great physiognomist" (154). Hetty is given no thoughts of her own and no means of expressing herself. This "every man" believes that nature's language is literal and establishes a one-to-one correspondence between inside and outside:

> Nature, he knows, has a language of her own, which she uses with strict veracity, and he considers himself an adept in the language. Nature has written out his bride's character for him in those exquisite lines of cheek and lip and chin, in those eyelids delicate as petals, in those long lashes curled like the stamen of a flower, in those dark liquid depths of those wonderful eyes. (154)

Every man's misreading of Hetty's face as a landscape and as language is doubly erroneous. Hetty's nurturing only exists as a mask she wears for others. In reality she detests children: "the very nuisance of her life--as bad as buzzing insects that will come teasing you on a hot day when you want to be quiet." Her littlest charge Totty Poyser "was still a day-long plague (156)." Idealizing landscape in typically Wordsworthian terms, the narrator makes the false link between natural beauty and love of children, misreading not only Hetty's own nature, but also the relation between femininity and maternal nature:

> How she will dote on her children! She is almost a child herself, and the little pink round things will hang about her like florets round the central flower...It is a marriage such as they made in the golden age, when the men were all wise and majestic, and the women all lovely and loving (154).

The narrator's ironic remarks place maternal affection in the same category as other attributes of a "golden age" and makes "lovely" and "loving" connected terms. Dwelling on the shared root "love" in two words, Eliot makes the fissures in love apparent; a lovely woman is not always a loving one. The narration doubles what it

has given us only pages before so the cherubic baby faces that had appeared as a garland of flowers transforms into a plague of insects around Hetty. The first description emerges from the narrator who ironically adopts the obviously skewed perspective of the doting men Arthur and Adam, a view shared by Hetty. In the second description one element of nature, originally floral and decorative, transforms into another, irritating and demanding. Later the real child that Hetty bears occupies the same place around her neck and seems to drag her down. Nature must be "read" carefully so as not to confuse the flowers with the insects, and men, inevitably distracted by the beauty of one, tend to ignore the nuisance of the other. A closer, more careful reading might reveal more of Hetty's true "nature." But even Hetty herself is incapable of such an understanding. In the center of this chapter Hetty can only sense who she is by reading the language of nature as straightforward. The narrator does not deny nature "her" truthfulness but suggests that the language is more complicated than simple. What nature, like language, provides is not a simple mirroring of reality, but a means to express something that must be interpreted carefully: "Nature has her language, and she is not unveracious; but we don't know all the intricacies of her syntax just yet, and in a hasty reading we may happen to extract the very opposite of her real meaning" (155).

Divided affections run throughout the novel Arthur discusses the difficult relations with his grandfather and Irwine who makes precisely the point that it is "not only woman's love" that is "unloving": "There's plenty of 'unloving love' in the world

of a masculine kind" (262). Like the mother who kills her child, the grandfather who dislikes his grandson embodies the difficulty in relation and the strangely paradoxical nature of being of two minds. Hetty illustrates the possibility of being of two bodies, her mouth described in pregnancy doubles her mouth in innocence:

> And yet, even in her most self-conscious moments, the face was sadly different from that which had smiled at itself in the old specked glass.... And the cheek was never dimpled with smiles now. It was the same rounded, pouting, childish prettiness, but with all love and belief in love departed from it--the sadder for its beauty, like that wondrous Medusa-face, with the passionate, passionless lips. (392)

Beauty, which had previously marked Hetty as feminine (and consistently her vanity is referred to by the narrator as a feminine trait), no longer serves to cheer, but in her pregnancy rather makes her sadder. Splitting her character into the observer and the observed, and then splitting her further down the lines of lips--the passionate and passionless lips of the Medusa--Eliot makes Hetty's beauty also the mark of her sadness. Punished for her prettiness, Hetty now must bear her feminine beauty as evidence of her duplicity. Bringing us back to the mirror where Hetty admired herself prior to her seduction, Eliot presents us with a confusing description. Now Hetty, who had previously viewed herself through male eyes, sees herself changed. Beauty, which had previously made her happy, is now the agent of sadness. The paradoxical description of Hetty as "passionate" as well as its seeming opposite "passionless"

illustrates the difficulty in simply regarding doubles as opposites or halves of one person. What do the words "passionate" and "passionless" mean?

To make the passionate/passionless question even more difficult, the reference to Medusa draws post-Freudian attentions downwards from Hetty's mouth to her vaginal lips. This second set of lips is the site of seduction and birth, the sight of which strikes fear into the male viewer. In her pregnancy, Hetty becomes beautiful in the same way that the horrifying Medusa, symbol of the mother's genitals and evidence of castration, paralyzes men. In Freud's essay "Medusa's Head' (1922) the Medusa both terrifies and excites the observer, reminding through the "stiffening" of his penis that he is not castrated. The Medusa's head is the symbol on the shield of the virgin goddess Athene which "repels all sexual desires--since she displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother" (Freud 272). Anne Carson writes in her remarkable essay, "The Gender of Sound," that Freud and his colleague Josef Breuer found themselves unable to deal with their patient Anna O. when she announced in a session with Breuer that she was about to give birth to a child. The equation of speech and maternity collapses two lips into one in such a way that "Even the talking cure must fall silent when both female mouths try to speak at the same time" (Carson 135). The Medusa of legend gives birth through her neck rather than her vagina, yet again confusing the issue of which lips issue which things. The maternal Medusa is the mother who silences men and for whom words and children are the same thing--both passionate and passionless.

The words that emerge from female lips in Eliot's novel are different from those spoken by the men.[8] As Bartle Massey, the crotchety teacher of night school, argues, Dinah's point of difference from other women rests on the appeal of her voice. He makes clear his disapprobation of the female sex and only excepts Dinah in particular from this generalization on the basis of her speaking. Bartle goes on to say that Dinah's difference probably only extends to her voice; in other ways she no doubt resembles "the rest o' the women." Dinah herself does much to suggest the same when she insists that her "speech" comes from outside her, "without any will of my own, and words were given to me that came out as tears come, because our hearts are full and we can't help it" (26). Just as Hetty's actions occur "in spite of herself" (393), Dinah acts without will. Clearly Dinah, like Hetty, does not act by herself, for herself.

When Dinah preaches she understands the importance of emphasizing particularity. She addresses her audience members individually rather than as "a body" and speaks to each "in particular" (25). George Eliot likewise viewed the duty of the great artist to make moral sentiment out of the telling of details. In order to move the reader, the writer had to be able to employ the particular details of real life. Eliot wrote in a book review in January 1857,

> Emotion links itself with particulars, and only in a faint and secondary manner with abstractions. An orator may discourse very eloquently on injustice in general, but leave his audience cold; but let him state a special case of

---

[8] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of female speech in *Between Men.*

> oppression, and every heart will throb . . . Strong emotion can no more be directed to generalities apart from particulars, than skill in figures can be directed to arithmetic apart from numbers. (164)

As J. Hillis Miller writes in *The Ethics of Reading*, the ideal of realism expounded by Eliot is about a search for a kind of language that is neither a name nor an abstraction; it cannot exist either in particularity or generality. For Eliot, the language in the novel must have some effect in the world outside of the words and in another world--"the pragmatic world of things and people. It must make the correct things happen"(73). In order for language to make this jump, Miller suggests that realistic narration must depend, as Chapter 17 of the novel does, on figurative language:

> Even more narrowly, it can be said to depend on a special form of figurative language: catachresis, the use of terms borrowed from another realm to name what has no literal language of its own. Only such language can perform into existence feelings, a will, a resolution. The operation of such catachreses is itself necessarily described in the figure of the chapter, as like this or as like that, since it cannot be literally described in itself. (73)

As Eliot dwells upon the categorical distinctions which make an individual separable from its class, so in language the naming of the mother represents a similar problem. Miller concentrates on how Eliot must use the terms of Dutch genre painting and describe the mirror in order to talk about writing. There is no way in writing to talk about writing. The figure of catachresis suggests a slippage where one word must

name two things and can also be read from the point of view of shared meanings. Miller finds Eliot's use of catachresis as an expression of power, an example of language going outside of language: "Only the performative catachresis of a figurative expression, that comes like a mighty rushing wind in upon the soul and breaks it in two almost, will work."

Catachresis stands as the rhetorical figure of maternity in the writings of many feminists. And "Lips," as Luce Irigaray employs them in her essay "When Our Two Lips Speak As One," names two parts of the female body. "Lips" in French is a catachresis as there is no other word available to describe the female genitalia except the word that describes the "lips" of her mouth. Irigaray's suggestion that the two should speak as one, that a mouth and genitals can express each other, draws upon the doubled sense of the words, but also provides a bridging of a schism between the physical presences of woman and her existence in discourse. Judith Butler suggests that the problem with catachresis is that it demonstrates a collapse between universals and particulars. Irigaray's "she", in Butler's analysis, defines the naming which would require a choice between these two modes of expression. Butler recognizes that in catachresis the distinction between the general maternal experience and its specific location is lost. For Gallop, the catachretic is parenthetical; maternal parentheses express divided lips and accomplish the task of both enclosing and containing, creating a bridge between the inside and the outside. "Irigaray's (post)modernist female body comes to synechdochically inhabit the lips (97) . . ." writes Gallop. "The

Latin terms may glitter like constellations in our English skies, but the French *levres* is a catachresis which always necessarily also refers to the mouth" (97). Gallop reinforces the necessary borrowing in Irigaray's original terms, in her own language. While "lips" may be metaphoric and thus, like a "constellation," carry a picture or pictures with it, Gallop reminds us that catachreses are much more grounded: "Irigaray embodies female sexuality in that which, at this moment in the history of the language, is always figurative, can never be simply taken as the thing itself" (98). Butler argues that,

> For Irigaray, the "feminine" which cannot be said to *be* anything, to participate in ontology at all, is-- and here grammar fails us--sets under erasure as the impossible necessity that enables any ontology. The feminine, to use a catachresis, is domesticated and rendered unintelligible..." (Bodies 39)

Butler's discussion of Irigaray swiftly moves backwards to an analysis of Plato for whom the "she" is a receptacle that is "neither a universal nor a particular." Butler also shifts the grounds of femininity to maternity. Naming requires a choice, but mothers cannot be named: "The receptacle cannot be named" (43). This problematic receptacle--the mother in language and in the body--eludes a naming that would enact violence or defer meaning. But, "Plato nevertheless proceeds to name what cannot be properly named, invoking a catachresis in order to describe the receptacle as a universal receiver of bodies even as it cannot be a universal . . ." (43). Butler draws the very specific relation between this linguistic act of naming and the position of the

maternal body: "Psychoanalytically, that material closeness is understood as the uncertain separation of boundaries between maternal body and infant, relations that reemerge in language as the metonymic proximity of signs" (46). The genealogy of catachretic lips from Plato through Irigaray and Butler demonstrates both a particular--a rootedness--and a general being.

Similar problems in distinguishing between the general category of mother and individual mothers arise throughout Eliot's novel and illustrate the slippage of the female body within Eliot's text. The duplicitous, doubled woman--both motherly and sexual, loving and lovely--previously hidden under one sign, doubles also the passionate/passionless woman. This tension inherent in naming inhabits the paradoxes Eliot scatters throughout the novel--"loving" and "unloving," "passionate" and "passionless." The description of Hetty as the "unnatural child of nature" illustrates the problem of naming an individual within a category.

Hetty changes from one thing to another, violating her category identity. Hetty is transformed from the pretty and heedless young thing to a pregnant and abandoned woman and finally into a murderer. Dinah changes from a serious preacher to a mother. In the crossover, Hetty's lips produce first her child and then her story. In contrast, Dinah's lips produce first her sermons and then her children. The lips are not capable of doing the two things at once, as babies silence mouths, killing children loosens tongues. One kind of lips always occupies two spaces and Eliot's splitting of women and mothers into two characters, Dinah and Hetty, illustrates this catachresis.

Each demonstrates a different point, a different kind of lip but does not reconcile the two into one. Irigaray takes the figure of catachresis as the figure of the divided female subject. In her writing the division signalled by the words "lips"(which always work in pairs) is privileged over oneness.[9]

By replacing the body of the mother and child with the plot of infanticide, Eliot privileges mouth over vagina. But by silencing both women in the novel and leaving us with the picture of maternal bliss, Eliot shows that there is really no choice at all. In Eliot's portrayal, lips cannot exist in both ways: either a woman enters into discourse, or she mothers. Deciding to speak requires the sacrifice of femininity, for the two can not coincide. Dinah's body as she speaks appears as unselfconscious as that of "a little boy" (19). While she speaks she appears not quite masculine, but not at all feminine. If speaking changes Dinah into a boy, prior to her sermon her body has no language. It does not have the feminine speech of the body which is self-conscious. Unlike Hetty, who is aware of every effect of her physical being, Dinah's body is innocent:

> . . . there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, "I know you think me a

---

[9]Henry James's review of this novel suggests that perhaps it goes on a few chapters too long that it should have ended with Hetty's trial. The union of Adam and Dinah at novel's end which ties up all the loose ends seemed too pat an ending. The trouble with such a structure would be the lack of a parable, the lack of an ending. Had the novel taken infanticide as its focus with Hetty at its center, redemption even through Dinah's evangelical spirit would have been too daring and dangerous a thing for a woman writer living with a married man and writing as a man to countenance. Apparent in Eliot's biography is her rejection of the commonplace morality of marriage and motherhood, that perhaps she has to write herself away from it (Karl 278).

> pretty woman, too young to preach;" no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips, no attitude of the arms. that said, "But you must think of me as a saint." (19)

Dinah does not use her body to speak, but rather conveys her message through words. Thus Dinah can utilize only one set of lips at a time.

Sexuality and motherhood, bodily expressions of femininity, are opposed to speech. As Robyn Warhol writes,

> Public speaking and preaching, too, were off limits for the woman who was anxious not to transgress gender lines. What the woman novelists did was to take two modes of potentially dangerous expression and combine them, forming a mode through which they could 'speak' without exposing themselves. (165).

The woman who speaks, even piously and morally, and even if she refuses to take credit for her own speech as Dinah does, runs the risk of bringing forth a monstrosity. Like Hetty, Dinah merely takes dictation, reciting sermons that she does not author. She is simply the means of transmission.

Equating nature with a text that must be interpreted, Eliot confuses words on the one hand and bodies on the other. Hetty herself confuses bodies and words. She is not only disturbed by the maternal body, but even the words associated with birth disturb her: "Hetty would have hated the very word 'hatching'" (157). The procedures of natural reproduction which would delight a Romantic poet's idealized sense of

barnyard behavior only disgust Hetty. In this passage again the confusion between the texts of nature and the nature of texts continues. Whether the egg hatches into a chicken or the chicken hatches the egg, Hetty's disdain for the word "hatching" precedes her own violent reaction to bearing a child. Dinah, in her sermon, refers also to chickens but in a nurturing sense, suggesting that the "blessed Lord" would gather people "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" (27). Even though Hetty inhabits the barnyard and dairy, the words attached to reproduction within this setting unsettle her. Texts and words seem to have more power over Hetty than reality, which fails to move her. She remains curiously untouched by her relationships with the people around her, never coming to care at all for the children she cares for. Unlike Dinah, whose view of the world out of the window was shaped by the people inhabiting it, Hetty does not care about other people. Hetty never comes to feel motherly, even if as she occasionally performs motherliness for an audience.

Although Hetty's confession occurs, as confessions are supposed to, after her crime, the confession almost seems to abdicate responsibility and to suggest that she is responding to a script not her own. Hetty's confession was also the only place where she actually speaks, even if her speech is dictated by Wordsworthian conventions. In reality, a confession could allow a Victorian baby-slayer to avoid hanging if she demonstrated suitable shame at her crime. Eliciting sympathy and shifting the onus of her wrong to the man who had seduced her, the accused woman's confession made clear that her murderous action was a last resort, occurring in desperation and

weakness rather than emerging from a subversive maternal strength. Hetty's confession follows this route. Revealing her shame and anguish to her cousin she describes her crime:

> "And then I got to Stoniton, and I began to feel frightened that night, because I was so near home. And then the little baby was born, when I didn't expect it; and the thought came into my mind that I might get rid of it, and go home again. The thought came all of a sudden, as I was lying on the bed, and it got stronger and stronger. . . . (462)

Confession figures as the only place in the novel where Hetty's child exists. The baby that was body is only text. The narrator has no access to the child: only Hetty's confession and the testimony at her trial allow for its existence at all. Hetty's description of her crime begins with a thought that enters her prior to her action. The baby however comes without warning and Hetty seems not even to know how she feels about "it" as she tries to return to an earlier scene: ". . . I didn't know how. . . I thought I'd find a pool, if I could." The pool she seeks is "like that other. . ." And having no model for motherhood she does not know how she feels: " . . . I don't know how I felt about the baby. I seemed to hate it--it was like a heavy weight hanging round my neck; and yet its crying went through me, and I daredn't look at its little hands and face . . . " (463). Hetty goes from describing what the baby is *not* and what she will *not* look at, to speaking of murder. If Wordsworth has given Hetty a template he has failed to provide her an alternative. The murder also occurs through a denial of

choice: she "couldn't kill it any other way." Hetty's speech is full of limits, not of choices: "I *couldn't* cover it quite up" and "I couldn't go away, for all I wanted to" (464). And even as Hetty leaves the baby's body behind, the voice of the baby follows her. She cannot sleep because of the sound of crying and when finally she returns to the place where she had buried the baby she cannot erase the sight of that place, nor the sound of the child from her mind. Even though she hears the voice of the child, she sees Wordsworth's mound of dirt: "I see it now. Oh Dinah! shall I allys see it?" (464).

The landscape always remains in Hetty's mind even though she cannot find access to her feelings, almost as if they are not her own: "I don't know what I felt till I saw the baby was gone . . . My heart went like a stone: I couldn't wish or try for anything; it seemed like if I should stay there for ever, and nothing 'ud ever change. But they came and took me away" (465). In the timeless landscape there is nothing that can ever change for Hetty. She cannot ever escape pools, mounds or baby cries. Once the baby is gone, her heart becomes a part of the scene, and she becomes an immutable part of the scenery. Hetty's description of the setting of the crime is embedded unalterably in her mind. Not unlike the Ancient Mariner in *Lyrical Ballads,* Hetty's only means to survive her past, is to tell the story:

> Hetty was silent, but she shuddered again, as if there were still something behind; and Dinah waited, for her heart was so full, that tears must come before words. At last Hetty burst out, with a sob,

"Dinah, do you think God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now I've told everything?" (465)

Eliot's project leads to the biographical question of what it means for a woman to write, even if she writes under a man's name. *Adam Bede* shifts between different speakers--the narrator, Hetty. The narrator and George Eliot in J. Hillis Miller's essay on the novel become one being, a "he." In contrast, Robyn Warhol distinguishes the narrator who tells the story from George Eliot who published the book. Warhol even goes a step further distinguishing between male and female components within the narrative voice, calling them alternately "he" and "she". Frederick Karl tracks Eliot's life changes through the different names she goes by: George Eliot, Marianne Evans, Marian Evans. The difficulty in assigning a name and a sex to the writer illustrates the difficulty in being a female and a writer. The novel shifts uneasily between the traditionally feminine mode of creation, procreation, and Dinah's career as preacher, pointing to the Eliot's own difficulty as woman and an author. The difficulty that Miller solves by referring to Eliot as a "he" is yet another catachresis. There being no word for the woman who is a writer, Miller must borrow the "he" from elsewhere.

The novel's third person narrator who is coded male thereby has no access to three scenes: the seduction, the birth, and the child's murder. Of these three, only the

third is narrated later. The other two remain hidden. In this way the vaginal lips are replaced (as catachresis also replaces them) with narrative. Stories emerge from one set of lips just as the babies had previously. Speaking lips replace vaginal ones, novels replace babies.[10]

iii. Parables and Realities

> The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there . . . have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable.
>
> George Eliot, *Felix Holt* (1866)

---

[10] In Eliot's novel parenthesis again express a doubled relation between female and mother. In the scene in the night school immediately following old Bartle's digression on the uselessness of women, parenthesis occur in a way that makes them emblematic in Eliot as in Gallop and Irigaray of the difficult position of the female (here the mother) in language. As Bartle has made clear, the only female he will abide his dog, Vixen, who has recently given birth to pups. He has even suggested infanticide--if he had known he would have drowned both her and her pups. The dog is referred to as a woman "He always called Vixen a woman, and seemed to have lost all consciousness that he was using a figure of speech" Here the dog becomes a woman, a mother. He says also if he had known in advance he could "have strangled the mother and the brats with one cord" (243). As schoolmaster bids Adam farewell at the gate, "Vixen, in a state of divided affection, had twice run back to the house to bestow a parenthetic lick on her puppies. (251).

Frank Kermode splits the world into two kinds of readers: "the world divides between those who seek to restore something authentic but lost and those who conclude that the nature of parable, and perhaps of narrative in general, is to be 'open'--open, that is, to penetration by interpretation" (84). In Kermode's mind the first of two ways of seeing literature is restorative and confident of the possibility of discovering authenticity within the text. The reader fills the gaps in the plotted surface with what he expects will make whole fabric out of pieces--supplying "authentic" restorations to supplement loss. In this approach the generous reader sees a narrative in relation to a world where closure may be achieved and accepts the novel as saying what it says and doing what it does unproblematically. The contentious second reader in Kermode's metaphor pulls apart the fabric of the text and *penetrates* it, searching for what Kermode "with pregnant intention" calls the "secrets" (81) hidden in its lining. In the second, less generous approach, the reader becomes more critical and scrutinizing, and instead of attempting to reconstruct the writer's desired text, unearths another story. Kermode designates the penetrated text as parable in opposition to the simple, impenetrable text. The reader of the parable pulls apart the holes to find another more subversive meaning, one that hides behind the "passionless seeming" appearance of the surface such as Eliot describes in *Felix Holt.* The reader of parable in both Kermode and Eliot looks below surface reality to an underworld which complicates the superficial initial reading.

To read the novel as a parable in Kermode's sense is to look more deeply at the

ending rather than accept its surface. Parable, allegory, and proverb are the same word in Hebrew and all seem to reflect a desire on the part of the prophet to disguise his meaning:

> It was at times necessary for a blunt prophet. . . to moderate or disguise his message for the ears of his less reflective constituents by fashioning a discourse difficult to pin down, addressed past the emotional multitudes to whose who shared his concerns. (Schokel, 199)

Kermode and Alters suggest the difference in reading parable is a vertical reading of a text, one that does not relate to the plot or the progression of a story line. For these writers, parable "is a temporary halt in the narration which is used to explore the depth and ground of what is past and impending. . ." "Parables clarify--but without blowing the narrator's cover or exhausting the underlying mystery of his subject matter" (Kermode 428). Dinah the prophetess in the novel predicts hell for her audience, just as Eliot perhaps predicts hell on earth in a more subtle and elliptical manner.

The Biblical parable of Dinah occurs in the book of Genesis in what Kermode reads as an intervention in the major narrative of Jacob's story. The "brutal story" is most notable as the story of Jacob's sons revenging the rape of their sister Dinah without ever admitting Dinah's voice.[11] The story emerges from Genesis both in its violence and its strange eruption seemingly unrelated to the rest of the text. Perhaps

---

[11] This story is normally seen "to be an intrusion" except that Fokkelman views it in the terms of a parable: "If we notice this and allow ourself to be instructed by the key words, we can integrate these passages thematically with their context despite their superficially digressive character (40).

what is most violent (or "chilling" to use Sedgwick's word for the other silence of Eliot's Dinah) is the silence of Dinah throughout the transactions between men. We could read the vengefulness of Adam against Arthur as mirroring Dinah's brothers' actions. This reading puts Hetty in the Biblical Dinah's place in the story and transposes seduction and rape making the two equivalent. For both the Biblical Dinah and Eliot's Dinah there is only silence at the end of the story--the fate of both Dinahs is sealed lips. Both Dinahs appear as a parable inside of larger narratives and both are victimized by their communities' desire for order. If this is true, then what message does this parable of brutal rape, revenge and female silence tell us? Lori Lefkowitz explicitly ties the Biblical Dinah to Eliot's novel, but to Hetty rather than to Dinah herself. The moral, says Lefkowitz, is that women should not "go out" (164). Dinah's punishment occurs because she leaves the confines of her home and enters the male world. Why then did Eliot, who certainly knew her biblical lore, name her character "Dinah," if not to hint at a darker side to her own Dinah's ultimate silence? Was Eliot's naming of Dinah a suggestion that Hetty's fate would be a lesson to Dinah as well?

Parable operates in disguise. Parable inserted in the heart of the realistic novel does not aspire to realism, but rather to a certain approximation of it. It imitates an abstract relation to reality, re-creating reality. Perhaps where critics have had their troubles with the notorious authorial interventions of Chapter Seventeen, where the narrator announces her theory of realism, is in refusing to see the presence of the

narrator within the text and refusing to see the parable in Eliot's description of reality. In this chapter, the narrator suggests that he could, but will not, "represent things as they never have been and never will be" (178). The idea of realism, according to the narrator, is to give

> a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (178)

The narrator writes from outside of the mirror and links that mirror to legal testimony. Hetty is the only character in the novel who occupies both spaces, and Hetty's confession is far from an empirical account. Eliot suggests the limitation of realism. What makes realism real is not its verisimilitude so much as the intention and emotional commitment of the narrator to revealing truth. Like the excuse that Arthur Donnithorne tries out, where intentions are as good as actions, Eliot's realism tries to do the right thing. The right thing may well not be to depict reality, though, but to disturb our placid regard for the mirror and to alert us to the omnipresence of its flaws--flaws that in a mirror become flaws on the face of the one who looks.

The ending of Adam's story--where he finds solace in Dinah rather than his original love Hetty--concludes the novel as it had begun, with a woman waiting at home for a man to return (Sedgwick 139). This doubled ending, where Hetty's story

ends after her trial and Adam's continues as he recovers from Hetty's betrayal and marries Dinah, was not Eliot's original impulse, but was rather suggested to her by her lover G. H. Lewes. Janice Carlisle questions whether the happy ending arises organically out of the events leading up to it: "By choosing to end the novel in a way that she did not originally envision, George Eliot casts doubt on the very perspectives that she has so carefully developed (210)." I want to suggest that the ending should not be read as if a tentative Eliot approached her mentor and lover for advice and then took his advice without worrying about the wholeness of her work. It is clear that Eliot wanted to cast doubt not only on the ending of her story, but on the "perfectly developed" perspectives in the beginning too (210). The clues Eliot plants within her text cast doubt on the happy ending itself and comment ironically on the problems of happy endings.

The function of the parable seems to center on the casting of doubt. To read this ending in the light of parable is to make it an aside, an excursion from the main story which acts in the same manner as Dinah's parable in Genesis, highlighting violence and disallowing closure. A desire to read the flaw in the novel only in its ending connects to the desire to ignore the flaws throughout. The traditional reading of *Adam Bede* as a realistic novel rather than a moral tale, parable or fable attempts to avoid the doubling and the questioning that has characterized the narratorial voice throughout. Like Dinah's parable, with its unsettling plot of rape and revenge, Eliot's novel seems to call for a resisting reader. Mary Helen Carpenter asserts: "The hidden

hermeneutics of *Adam Bede* thus produce a second reading of the story that consistently opposes the comforting conclusions the reader would draw from the first" (32). The novel's announced attempt to try to achieve a direct transcription of a reality seems contradicted by an ironic reading of the novel's ending.

Chapter Five

Having It Both Ways:
Sentimental Infanticide in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

> "If we could get a breed of gals that didn't care, now, for their young uns," said Marks, "tell ye, I think 't would be 'bout the greatest mod'rn improvement I know on."
>
> -*Uncle Tom's Cabin*

"O, that child!--how I loved it!" exclaims one of the mothers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In a sentimental novel that relies on the belief in motherhood as the salvation of America and woman's supreme calling, it is hardly surprising to find such declarations of love from a mother for her child. Cassy's story of maternal devotion continues: "I took the little fellow in my arms, when he was two weeks old, and kissed him, and cried over him; and then I gave him laudanum, and held him close to my bosom, while he slept to death. How I mourned and cried over it! and who ever

dreamed that it was anything but a mistake, that had me give it laudanum?" Cassy escapes suspicion because it would seem that a mother who mourns and weeps over her child could never kill it, but it is precisely because she loves the child that she murders it. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* begins with the account of a slave mother squeezing her child to death and throughout its pages maternal infanticide occurs with regularity. The interlocking narratives of sentimentality, fetishism and infanticide in Stowe's famous and influential work provide a means of reading this book as more than the simple story of maternal goodness, but also as a demonstration of how the emphasis on the essential goodness of mothers is bound to a story of maternal evil.

In the novel, sentimentality and maternal fetishism operate along parallel paths, both leading inexorably to infanticide. Both depend upon a belief in overarching maternal power. Both depend upon an oscillation between two beliefs, requiring the ability to hold incommensurate ideas at once. Both emphasize the importance of objects which are invested with meaning. Underlying both is the importance of point of view. In sentimentality, point of view opens up a new way of seeing. In fetishism, the child's point of view and a given moment dictates his sexuality for a lifetime. Both sentimentality and fetishism make the act of seeing the primary mode of experience.

The Freudian narrative of fetishism begins with an act of seeing. The sight of the castrated mother cause the fetishist to disavow reality. The sentimentalist also believes in a wish over a reality, and like the fetishist invests illogical or asocial value

in an object. The incomplete denial of the mother's castration which forms the foundation of fetishism puts the fetishist in the position of a constant oscillation between what is known and what is wished for--the "I know, but . . ." that Octave Mannoni speaks of, where the stories of maternal powerlessness and maternal strength continually seesaw back and forth. At their fulcrum is the stability of a fetish invested with repressed sexual energy.[1] The value assigned to the thing is based not upon abstraction, but upon emotional and personal attachment. The boy child glimpses his mother's lack--her supposed castration. Rather than come to terms with what she doesn't have, and even in the face of physical evidence to prove her lack, through the process of disavowal he holds onto the belief in his mother's penis. In order to maintain his belief in the fantastic phallic mother he focusses obsessively on something else. This "something else" is generally metonymically associated with the lack--hair, shoes, lingerie. The fetish functions as a replacement of the female genitalia and a refusal on the part of the male child to acknowledge his mother's missing penis. By looking away from the actual mother, the male child is able to continue to believe that she is what is known in Freudian theory as "the phallic mother"--that she has retained her power. In this move, truth and reality are masked by what is imagined and wished, so that the child can believe contradictory ideas: his mother has a penis, his mother lacks a penis.

Freud's story is both triumphant and abject. The young fetishist is able to get

---

[1] I am here avoiding the debate surrounding the sex of the fetishist. Naomi Schor and others have argued that it is possible for the female to fetishize.

two things at once, to become a man and to let his mother remain one too. The same balancing between the two makes it possible to read the story two ways, as the fetishist transforms his desire for his mother--his love for her--into the love of a thing. The fetishist cannot face the real loss of the maternal phallus and turns away rather than admit to the loss. The fetishist's desire, like the sentimentalist's, maintains an uneasy balance between reality and the ideal, and finds satisfaction in the thing.

Sentimentality undermines the difference between reality and an ideal. Built on the gap between what we know reality to be and what we wish from the world, sentimentality exploits the difference, investing objects with human qualities and bestowing sympathy on the unfortunate sufferers. Sentimentality makes value individually determinable. A thing's worth is related to the feeling it holds and is thus acquired through individual experience rather than abstract laws. This strategy of investing objects with feeling can be identified in both the formal procedures and the thematic concerns of Stowe's sentimentality. The person who invested emotion into an object made it worth more than its market value.[2] Philip Fisher claims that sentimentality "by its experimental extension of humanity to prisoners, slaves,

---

[2] Gillian Brown in *Domestic Individualism* and Lynn Wardley in "Relic, Fetish, Femmage: The Aesthetics of Sentiment in the Work of Stowe" examine from differing angles the importance of property in sentimentalism. For Wardley, the object functions as leftovers from African culture, whereas for Brown it emblematizes an escape from the dictates of the marketplace. Both Herbert Ross Brown in *The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860* (1940) and Douglas read the sentimental as endangering realism and morality through a seductive and weak-willed consumerism. The visual stimulus of sentimentality is seen by Douglas as "decorative," charming and flattering to women.
Sentimentality in Winifred Fluck's definition it is "a mode of representation marked by gestures of rhetorical excess and exaggeration (321)."

madmen, children, and animals, exactly reverses the process of slavery itself which has at its core the withdrawal of human status from a part of humanity (100)."[3] The action of transferring humanity from the writer/reader onto the object within the text depends upon an oscillation between its position as thing or as human. In order for sentimentality to achieve this movement, the thing that becomes a person must retains its object status in the world outside of the text. The movement in the novel depends upon a stasis outside the novel. The sentimental can perform its work only through a radical disjuncture between the world it seeks to reform and the world it idealizes. In Fisher's definition, the content of the sentimental requires that its form will constantly oscillate between the object and the non-object. As Stephanie Smith argues against Fisher's position:

> ...if sentimentality depends on the denial of contradictions and the eradication of difference, if sentimentality produces only attenuation of pain or the obliteration of the very persons taken as "objects" of solicitation, then one most conclude that sentimentality itself is deeply suspect, a tool only and forever of the status quo. (39)

Uncle Tom's Cabin's original subtitle, *The Man who was a Thing*, plays on the

---

[3] Fisher's *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* and Jane Tompkin's *Sensation Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790--1860* both take on the denigration of the sentimental that has characterized much criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Winifred Fluck's article, "The Power and Failure of Representation in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," goes a step further by analyzing the claims of literary critics both feminist and other and tracing the dis-ease with sentimentality that has inhabited even that work and to examine why the sentimental novel seems to force critics into a position of either defending a text for its cultural context or criticizing it as an aesthetic failure.

movement between humanity and objecthood. The play of words, however, relies upon the reader's belief that a "man" cannot be a "thing," as well as the reader's understanding that some things, i.e. slaves, *are* men. In Frederick Douglass's famous line, a man becomes a slave. The slave and the man are interchangeable, discrete and unconnected from surrounding environments. Stowe's narrative of women and things is much more complicated.

The crossing of the object from *thing* to *human* does not make the object into an actual human. As in fetishism, where a thing replaces a human and becomes an object, sentimental power is a function that does not inhere in the nature of the thing itself. The thing is not a person until a real person notices it and grants it a portion of his or her own humanity. The central actor in both stories is the one bestowing humanity or power onto the other. The director of the drama is the one who controls both halves of the transaction. The child in fetishism, and the white mother/reader in sentimental fiction retain the power to withdraw what they have given, and both narratives seesaw between empowering and disempowering the mother.

Critics of sentimental fiction are torn between two positions, one that sees sentimentality as conformist and stereotypically devoted to a passive ethics of home and hearth, and the other which views the sentimental as "profoundly subversive" (220).[4] In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the blurred distinction between people and property

---

[4] Jane Tompkins' argument situates Stowe's novel within the context of culture as a whole: "The power of the dead or the dying to redeem the unregenerate is a major theme of nineteenth century popular fiction and religious literature. Mothers and children are thought to be uniquely capable of this work" (128). Tompkins' mirroring one of the conventions of

leads to a confusion between ownership and reproduction.[5] As with the fetishist, the mother's attachments are based upon emotion and upon a denial of the market value of things. In contrast, the slave trader's values reflect those of capitalism itself and are rationalized in a manner that has no regard for the domestic and individual. Both he and his customers are robbed of the ability to express value outside of the marketplace (Brown 51). Stowe employs "a logic of fetishism often associated with commodities" endowing "domestic possessions" with a different and more mystical sense derived from an "empathy between the object and its owner" (Brown 51). The owner of the thing is related to the thing by means of her emotional attachments. Mothers own children in the same way that they own clothes, furniture, slaves. "The personification of objects, which for Stowe is a function of their removal from the market, makes them mediums of human history" (52). Intimately tied up with the formal structures of sentimentality (the recurrent reunion and separations, the dependence upon detail) is a thematic concern with childhood, death, family and motherhood. In Stowe's narrative,

---

the sentimental novel, demands that we place ourselves in the position of readers of the novel in order to see "how its tearful episodes and frequent violations of probability were invested with a structure of meanings that fixed these works...in the very bedrock of reality" (127). Tompkins says that Ann Douglas' argument in *The Feminization of America* is "too simplistic" and denies a certain kind of power that is in keeping with nineteenth-century religious ideas. We cannot understand the willingness of women to submit themselves in a Christian effacement because our culture no longer respects this sort of behavior and can only see it as abasement. Placing herself in relation to another debate over the value of sentimentality, one which considers the specific importance of the sentimental literature to women, Tompkins aligns herself with Mary Kelley.

[5] This distinction is also the distinction between capitalism and chattel slavery. In capitalism people's labor, their creation of things, is reified. Under chattel slavery, people are things.

things (hair, furniture, baby clothes) become meaningful and attain almost human status through the mother's emotional investment, what Gillian Brown reads as a "feminized ethic of possession." Objects like Rachel Halliday's kitchen chair and Eva's precious hair are represented with an emotional resonance bordering on fervor. By focussing on the mother as the linchpin of the home and family, and the home and family as a microcosm of the nation, Stowe suggests that maternal power is power outside the home. The novel draws attention to the difficulty in keeping private and domestic separate from public.

Directly addressing mothers, the narrator transforms children's clothing into emblems of loss. When the white mother Rachel Bird opens the drawer and reveals the treasured clothes of her dead baby, she shows how the child's clothing represents something more than clothes: "And oh! mother that reads this, has there never been in your house a drawer, or a closet, the opening of which has been to you like the opening again of a little grave?" (90) The narration moves from the description of objects to direct address. Any mother, suggests the narrator, has a drawer or closet that resembles "a little grave." Opening up the grave and opening up the cupboard become equivalent. The baby clothing fits all babies--white or black--equally well, and provides the link between all mothers who share the experience of losing children.

The movement from the mother outside the text to the mother inside the text is accomplished through the use of an engaging narrator, one who invites the reader into the story. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s opening scene illustrates the importance of point of

view to this strategy. Haley, the slave trader, attempts to show that he is more sensitive to the feelings of slaves than most slave traders are. Negotiations for the purchase of George Shelby's trusted house servant Uncle Tom are disrupted by the entrance of the quadroon Jim Crow who dances for the visitor and sings "one of those wild, grotesque songs common among the negroes." The child's ability to imitate an old man's performance--the "appearance of deformity and distortion"--entices Haley into proposing that the child be thrown in alongside Uncle Tom in the transaction. Haley relates an anecdote to reassure Shelby that he is sensitive to the sentimental attachments of slaves, and that he is aware that the boy who has just been presented as a spectacle is also a mother's child:

> "I knew a real handsome gal once, in Orleans . . . . The fellow that was trading for her didn't want her baby; . . . . . I tell you, she squeezed up her child in her arms, and talked, and went on real awful. It kinder makes my blood run cold to think on 't; and when they carried off the child, and locked her up, she jest went ravin' mad and died in a week. Clear waste, sir, of a thousand dollars . . . (7)

This story, designed to reassure Shelby, does nothing to calm Jim Crow's mother Eliza, who stands outside the door. As Haley's audience widens to include the slave mother, the reader becomes aware of the limits of Shelby's and Haley's considerations. Jim Crow, previously a thing, the object of their business dealings, appears now as a person, the object of his mother's love. Winifred Fluck suggests that

> By shifting to the perspective of one of the potential victims, the novel manages to transform us from an imaginary participant in a conversation with the authorial voice--and thus from the position of a social equal--to the stance of a helpless onlooker who can only compensate for his or her own helplessness by an intensification of emotional involvement. (327)

The way in which the narration moves in these first pages demonstrates the novel's central premise that maternal eyes cannot perceive slavery as anything but evil. In addition, the novel aligns its readership with mothers. By making the reader see first as Haley and Shelby see, and then shifting from the interior of the room to the outside where the mother listens, Stowe moves us both spatially and emotionally into a narrative that has two sides. What first appears natural--the conversation about business matters--changes into something else when considered from Eliza's marginalized perspective. The narrative thus continually oscillates between two positions, one that represents the conventional views of slave as object and of woman as mother, and another that recognizes the limitations of this first position by seeing that slave women are also mothers.

The oscillation between slave as object and slave as child, between the perspectives of the slave trader and mother, corresponds precisely to the kind of change in perspective that is present in fetishism. Using fetishism as a way of reading novels in *Feminizing the Fetish*, Emily Apter suggests that the narrator who watches, drawing attention to his or her absence from the scene, like the fetishist, and like

fetishism itself, performs "a significant mediating function between exhibitionism and voyeurism on the one hand and masochism and sadism on the other "(xv). Apter argues that the voyeur coincides with the sadist and the masochist with the exhibitionist. Fetishism, with its dependence upon the visual, operates with the mother in the position of exhibitionist/masochist and the child in the position of the voyeur/sadist. Stowe's scene revises this structure so that the voyeur is the mother and the masochist and the exhibitionist is the child. Between the two, the slave owners acting as sadists and voyeurs perform without knowing it. Introducing a third perspective to the scene, Stowe disrupts the reading. This third term, the mother, alters also the story of fetishism. Reading this opening sequence according to Apter, we find a reader who is first identified with the sadistic eyes of the owner and trader and then, immediately, with the mother. This movement between viewpoints enables a child to retain on the one hand an idealized view of his mother's power and on the other a more realistic picture.

The story of fetishism, with its emphasis on the figure of the phallic mother, helps us to see the sentimental embodiment of the slave mother as both powerful and powerless. Robert Stoller suggests that the object becomes a fetish when it substitutes for unconscious meanings; an object is invested with the story of a human, the story that the fetishizer himself cannot even recognize as a fetish. For Stoller "a fetish is a story masquerading as an object" (92). Fetishism provides a bridge between differences, a glossing-over of specifics. Fetishism's roles are defined by position and

relation and avoid complications. Superficially in fetishism the story cannot be perceived, and the plot of difference is subsumed in the identity of a thing. Sentimentality disguises people as things and avoids the "real" facts of life. Ann Douglas has argued that the power that women imagined for themselves in sentimental novels was merely an avoidance of their weakness in reality. For Douglass, stories glorifying the afterlife, focussing on the death of children and on placid domesticity, were merely aestheticising, but certainly not empowering, acts by women. The cult of motherhood "was nearly as sacred in mid-nineteenth century America as the belief in some kind of democracy. (73)" Douglas's views the link between politics and motherhood as a false one. The power of the mother held no real influence according to Douglas but was "flattery" that took the place "of justice and equality" (75). Douglas refutes the belief that the domestic realm has any influence outside of the household, or that anything within the household has power to move beyond its walls. The emphasis on death in sentimentality Douglas views as an act of false consciousness on the part of women who, "Barred by external taboos and internal anxieties from elaboration on the overly sexual acts of impregnation and childbirth, ... concentrated on illness and death; they were more interested in the moment at which crude energy failed than in those at which it accelerated" (202).

In the avoidance of issues of sexuality and childbirth lies the inherent paradox of the nineteenth-century maternal ideal. The figure of the mother herself resembled a divine being, essentially nurturant and chaste, the realities of how she became a

mother were rendered invisible: "A mother is, next to God, all powerful" (quoted in Lerner, 3). A mother was as removed from real life as God's power. Even as mothers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seem to exert this overarching power through the family, their position as matriarch is fleeting and their influence limited. The expectation that, through her moral superiority, the mother can bear the responsibility for changing the world is belied by the actual weakness of mothers who cannot even exert authority in their own homes.

The fundamentally transient nature of the mother's power is a function of the transient nature of childhood. All children leave behind their clothes whether they die or live to outgrow them. The secrets that lurk in closets or tucked in the drawers of good mothers are small vestments. The narrator makes growing out of clothes and dying almost equivalent. If the mother has been successful, her child has outgrown the clothes and the mother. Or, the child has died. If the mother has seen herself only as a mother, what is left for her in either the best or worst case? The result is the same: the child is gone. In fact, the dead child remains part of the mother's life in ways that the grown child does not.

Sylvia Hoffert suggests that the "death of a child was a double loss, a loss of child and of self." Hoffert believes that because mothers use the concept of motherhood as a foundation of their "self-definition," the death of a child would also destroy the fundamental identity of the mother.[6] Yet, the doubleness which

---

[6] Noting the inconsistency in this logic, Smith concludes that Stowe's women were employing death and suicide threats throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "In the end, what

characterizes this loss directly mirrors the doubled position of the maternal fetishist. In Freud's story, the fetishist gives power to the mother, allowing her to have her phallus. Freud allows the girl child to get her own version of power by becoming a mother and replacing the phallus she doesn't have with a boy baby. In maternal fetishism the mother keeps the phallus for herself by replacing it with a baby, in the same way that the traditional fetishist replaces with mother's phallus with a thing. Rather than being satisfied to have the phallus in its baby incarnation for a short time, she refuses to give it up. The mistake in Freud's logic is clear; why would a mother give up her power--hand it over to her baby boy--if she could find another way? As Ann McClintock's brilliant use of fetishism makes clear, castration itself is not necessarily a bodily experience but a social one, intrinsic to the child's (female or male's) position in a patriarchal structure:

> Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level. These contradictions may originate as social contradictions but are lived with profound intensity in the imagination and the flesh. The fetish thus stands at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory. The fetish marks a crisis in social meaning as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution (McClintock, 184).

Stowe's monument to maternal iconography cannot address is that the only evident source of power within legitimate patriarchal motherhood is the power of negation (106)."

McClintock bridges the social and the personal, giving fetishism political power. With much the same goals, Tompkins granted *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a saliency not limited to the personal and domestic, but of importance to the society at large: "The specifically political intent of the novel" is "world-shaking" rather than intimately domestic (146). In both views, the personal *is* the political, just as the story of individual mothers in Stowe's novel becomes the story of mothers in general.

In Stowe's description of Eliza's passage across the Ohio river the life of one mother is telescoped into a "thousand lives" and "one moment." The Ohio River represents the boundary between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North. The lives of other mothers, of all mothers, rest on Eliza's crossing. The young mother and her child flee the plantation with the slave catchers hot on their trail. Once on the other side, Eliza will be free. An object will become a woman. As she comes to the river, the intercedence of fate or God provides the passage between two realms in the form of an iceberg which conveniently ferries her across. As she hears the slavers at the door, Eliza acts immediately:

> A thousand lives seemed to be concentrated in that one moment to Eliza. Her room opened by a side door to the river. She caught her child, and sprang down the steps towards it . . . . In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind they came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the

> turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. It was a desperate leap--impossible to anything but madness and despair .... (62)

This passage from one realm into the other leaves the mother's bloodied footprints on the ice and the slave hunters on the bank. Built into this communion of mothers is a sense that miraculous intervention will save the day. The unreality of the scene is denied by God's intercedence. The mother, with only "madness" and "despair" to fuel her, is capable of anything. The laws of reality and probability, which would assure the reader of the impossibility of an iceberg conveniently transporting the slave mother, are ignored.

Later in the novel Eliza's own mother Cassy confesses how the very same madness and despair which allows one mother to perform miracles leads another mother to infanticide. Maternal madness and despair, anger and impotence are the flip side, the result even, of maternal power and godlike virtue. The connection between Eliza and Cassy, though not evident until later in the novel--Eliza is the daughter of the infanticidal mother--seems to show that the difference between the infanticidal mother and the miraculous mother is merely incidental. Motherhood can go as easily in either direction.

ii. The Other Side of the River: Infanticide and Maternal Power

Freud's story is about a child, from a child's perspective. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, fetishism has the mother at its center. Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document* explores the possibilities for a maternal fetishism. Kelly suggests that the means by which a mother deals with her dread of losing her child is to "delay" or to "disavow" that separation. The mother fetishizes the child and saves memorabilia. Kelly's art endows objects related to her child--dirty diapers, locks of hair, scribblings--with excessive value. To save her child from growing up, departure, and death, she focusses on the things that have come to represent the child to her. The reality that the mother denies in maternal fetishism is the knowledge of her own powerlessness. In Freud's story of sexual difference, the female's compensation for her alleged castration comes in the form of a child. The baby substitutes for the phallus that no female can never own. What Freud does not examine is that the baby is only a baby for a short amount of time, therefore the mother only temporarily manages to hold onto her phallic substitute. The recognition that the child will not always be there, something that the mother is more attuned to than Freud is, seems to be a new form of castration anxiety; in this case the mother's focus and fear is not on the penis, but the child. Fetishism itself is a disavowal of maternal castration, so maternal fetishism continues this pattern. According to Emily Apter, Kelly "transforms the rites of childhood burial into the theory and aesthetic practice of female fetishism." (113). Kelly's work allows for the difference between the male's and the female's relation to the phallic mother. The mother who fears castration through the loss of a child makes things

become children just as Stowe's original title made people into things. According to this logic, the mother who disavows castration does so by making things replace her lost child (according to another logic entirely, penis envy is really a weak revision of baby envy). The fantasy of maternal power allows for a kind of self-castration whereby the mother internalizes her castration and enacts it for herself by killing her child before it can be taken from her.

The mother who kills her slave-child preserves the child for herself. Infanticide, which removes the child from an economic transaction, paradoxically also saves the child. Death preserves the child as a child, in a pure condition, rather than allowing her to become a grownup or slave. Thus death is an alternative more appealing in sentimentality than a capitulation to the real world. Infanticide becomes a means to preserve the child and a way for a mother not to avoid her maternality so much as to embrace it forever.

Cassy's infanticide, unlike that of the other infanticidal mothers--Hetty Sorrel, Martha Ray and Meg Murdockson--seems completely her own. The act, however, is complicated by her position as slave mother. She is not punished for her infanticide, but her infanticide results from her punishment. Cassy's first child Henry is torn from her arms in a moment that represents Cassy's recognition of her position in slavery and of her child's: "the poor boy screamed and looked into my face, and held on to me, until they carried him in, screaming 'Mother! mother! mother!'" (366). This scene of recognition serves to locate Cassy as castrated and weak, both in terms of gender and

race. It is the memory of this scene of separation/castration that provokes her murder of her next son, a son who is never named except in reference to the other lost one. She re-enacts the separation by killing her own child. In this instance, both boys become one, though they are the children of different fathers. Cassy's response to the loss of her child/phallus is to reenact the loss. Cassy performs the act on herself, for herself, thereby maintaining control. Cassy's murder of her own child doubles the previous narrative of separation and allows her to mourn for the first child once again, as if the second had never been born. The good and bad mother combine in Cassy as she relates the story of her infanticide. She cannot treat the second son in the same way as the first one: "I used to love to read to Henry, to play to him, to waltz with him, and sing to him; but everything I did for this one was perfect drag . . ."(365). Unlike the first boy, the second is like a weight, like the child that clings to Hetty's Sorrel's neck pulling her down.

From out of the mouths of boys and men--on the lips of the dying Saint Clare, spoken by Cassy's boy dragged off by his new master, and as called out by Simon Legree in his terror-- the word "mother" changes meaning throughout the novel, shifting from the impassioned cry of the disempowered child to the terrified scream of the slave owner. The wish that mother could be stronger reiterates the idealizing fantasy of the phallic mother. In each case, the subject who clings to the fantasy of the mother as powerful and calls for the mother either with fear or demand, cannot see her, only the proof of her castration. Cassy relates the story of her infanticide to Uncle

Tom in a scene that is remarkably similar to Hetty's confession to Dinah. She brings together two meanings for the word "mother": one who is all-powerful and one completely powerless. Valerie Smith suggests that "infanticide was nearly a logical mandate for mothers who would do best by their children and their country (106)." Instead of seeing infanticide as irrational, Smith's analysis views it as ultimately an inevitable result of slavery: "In this sentimental economy, a woman's only legitimate form of passionate, creative expression is in the arrangement of death" (107).

After Uncle Tom has enlightened her about religion, Cassy gives up her body and takes on the disembodied role of Legree's mother. She ceases to be Legree's mistress and becomes the ghost of his mother. Even as she has, at Tom's behest, confessed her sins and seemingly reformed, she does not give up the wish to infanticide. Representing not herself, but the deceased white mother, Cassy reenacts her previous infanticide and causes Legree's death.

The slave mother becomes a fascinating object not simply to Simon Legree but to the reader as well. Her powerful sexuality and her intense commitment to her child make her fascinating. Both as the fetish object and the fetishizing mother, Cassy maintains herself as sexual object and mother almost as if she can play two parts in the fetish play. When Cassy's children are sold, she refers to the difficult position of the slave mother which makes her sexual prey to white men, saying "you can do anything with a woman, when you've got her children." The sexual undertone here is clear, but reverses what is normal and expected; doing "anything with a woman" gives her

children. In this perversion, the men are not related to their progeny and the women must have sex because they already have children, not in order to get them. Mothering is the link between all women, the enslavement of all women. Rather than making her chaste and pure, as it does white mothers, motherhood renders the slave mother even more sexually vulnerable. Strikingly, the child who replaces Cassy's first son is only signified by the pronoun "he" and "it" almost interchangeably. The description of Cassy, like her description of her son, begins with an 'It': "It was a woman, tall and slenderly formed, with remarkably delicate hands and feet . . . " And like the fetish described by Stoller, she is an object who is a story. Evaluating her as one assesses livestock, the description makes her also an object of mystery--her body has the marks of a story, a "romantic history," upon it: "By appearance of her face, she might have been between thirty-five and forty; and it was a face that, once seen, could never be forgotten,--one of those that at a glance, seem to convey to us an idea of a wild, painful, and romantic history . . .." (353).

Although Cassy's confession of her infanticide to Uncle Tom seems on the surface to redeem her, her subsequent masquerade of infanticide with Simon Legree suggests that she is yet unregenerate. If this is not enough to convince a reader of Stowe's book that infanticide remains an option for mothers despite all superficial indications otherwise, then a final suggestion makes it clear. As Cassy and her daughter-figure Emmeline (Legree's replacement mistress) escape from Legree's plantation, Emmeline says that she may faint. Cassy's response, "If you do, I'll kill

you!", is accompanied by the brandishing of a "small, glittering stiletto" (407). A few pages later, Cassy insists that she was acting only to stop Emmeline from fainting. But she continues to justify her murderous threat by linking it to the sexual traumas associated with slavery: "If I had not stopped you, that wretch might have had his hands on you now."

iii. Black Mother/White Ghost: Erasure of Difference

The figure of the mother serves as a way of bridging the very real gap between the slave mother and her middle-class readership. Maternal infanticide as well as maternal love provide the link between the book's white readership and its black subject matter. Cassy's heroic act as the impersonator of Simon Legree's mother can be read as a moment in which race is completely erased in the service of maternal power through the fetish of hair.

The hair that ties together episodes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is always hair of a white mother or a white child. Even as Cassy describes her child in terms of his hair, it resembles his father's hair not hers: "He was the image of his father,--he had such beautiful eyes, such a forehead, and his hair hung all in curls around it... (364)" As Henry Louis Gates notes in his memoir, *Colored People*, African Americans make the distinction between "good" and "bad" hair in "kitchen"-- not the domestic center of the

house, but the kink that grows up the back of the head. In the alchemy of hair care, good hair is that which resembles white people's hair. All of the hair that sentimentally binds mother to child in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is white and "good." Taking the novel by its hair, so to speak, we can see just how Stowe reserves true humanity for whiteness, as black hair hardly ever enters into the story at all.[7]

The only hair in Stowe's novel that resembles black hair is Topsy's.[8] The hair that threatens the bond between black and white women, Topsy's recalcitrant locks, represents the hair of a child who eschews maternal power entirely, claiming to have been "grow'd" not born. Topsy can leave the white Miss Ophelia "'paralyzed with amazement," but her hair can never be mistaken for Miss Eva's. Eva, the paragon of goodness, distributes her own blonde hair from her deathbed. It is the golden lock of hair that she gives to Tom which enrages Legree later in the novel when Miss Eva's hair is mistaken for that of Legree's mother.

The fetish object, the hair that slides through the pages of Stowe's book, always

---

[7] In nineteenth-century Britain and America hair was intimately associated with death. Jewelry was woven from the locks of hair of the dead and distributed at funerals to mourners. Locks of hair were often stuck in jewelry that resembled minuscule coffins or sometimes just pasted inside of books commemorating lost loved ones. Often the hair was accompanied by poetry of an inspirational nature (Miller, 102). The very popularity of hair jewelry, however, caused its fall from favor. In the 1860's Sears Roebuck entered into the hair jewelry market and made it the province of a lower class previously excluded from the traffic in hair. The mail order hair jewelry business made the whole procedure into an object of suspicion. How could one be certain that Sears was actually sending back one's own hair? (Miller 103).

[8] Topsy occupies a space that Ruthe Thompson claims, "Represents a dangerous threat to the vision of domesticity Stowe has posited," a link that Thompson sees as like that of the Medusa, a reminder of castration (25).

belongs to a white person, is always either removed from the head of the white woman or child, or, in the case of Eliza's hair during her escape when she impersonates a man, always *appears* to have been removed from the head of a white person. As in the depictions of Eliza as a white mother, the mother and the fetish which represents her power are only seen in terms of whiteness. [9]

Again, hair performs the magical binding action in both Eliza's and Cassy's fetish dramas. Brown suggests that "Simon Legree's mother bestowed her hair for the reformation of her son; this maternal cord of sustenance enslaves him to his superstitions . . . *Uncle Tom's Cabin* urges that all women, like Cassy, pull their strings" (37). Whether apron strings or umbilical cords, the mother's strings or the shared physical bonds, the maternal hair is used by the infanticidal woman to make her both the most powerful slave and most powerful woman in the novel.

Hair provides the most frequent link between death, sentimentality and fetishism. The lock of little Eva's hair, last seen at her deathbed when she gave it to Tom, reappears on Legree's plantation where it substitutes for Legree's dead mother's

---

[9] I have use the concept of fetishism in the same way that Stowe uses hair. I have only considered it in the European psychoanalytic sense and (slightly) in its Marxist economic meaning. Lynn Wardley reads Stowe's novel through another kind of fetishism, seeing in the emphasis on the power objects as a borrowing from West Africa. For Wardley Stowe's novel imports the fetish in the spiritual sense into a middle-class white world. What DuBois defines as a "spiritual explanation of physical evil and it explains by making all things spirit," fetish marks the racial aspects of the text and reads the sentimental not simply as the product of middle-class white women but something that is formed in dialogue with slave culture. This reading breaks down the binary between masculine and feminine that has informed our readings so far and puts in place race as a complicating factor. Returning to Cassy, I will read her escape and triumph over Simon Legree as an attempt to disregard racial difference.

hair. The hair itself seems to become supernatural in Legree's mind as "like a living thing, [it] twined itself round Legree's fingers" (372). His reaction to the hair allows Cassy to recognize the power of the idea of mothering over Legree's mind: "Hard and reprobate as the godless man seemed now, there had been a time when he had been rocked on the bosom of a mother" (373). But Legree "followed the steps of his father" rather than his mother who loves him only because she is a mother: "He never came home but once, after; and then, his mother, with the yearning of a heart that must love something, and has nothing else to love, clung to him, and sought, with passionate prayers and entreaties, to win him from a life of sin . . ." (373). His mother forgives Legree even when in a rage he "threw her senseless to the floor" (373) and cares enough to send a lock of hair to him from her deathbed. Her love, like Eva's, represents itself in the deathbed parcelling of locks of hair. But the physical evidence of motherlove does not soothe Legree: "Legree burned the hair, . . .and when he saw them hissing and crackling in the flame, idly shuddered as he thought of everlasting fires . . ." (374). At this point both Eva's and the mother's hair have become interchangeable and inseparable. The hair comes to mean much more than the sum of its strands, providing a pivot between Legree's past and his present. Cassy heightens this effect in Legree's mind by impersonating a singing ghost and convincing Legree that he has been haunted by the mother he had so mistreated. Avenging both her own treatment by Legree and his treatment of his mother, Cassy makes Legree obsess about hair.

> In his heavy and feverish sleep, a veiled form stood beside him, and lay a cold, soft hand upon him. He thought he knew who it was; and shuddered with creeping horror, though the face was veiled. Then he thought he felt *that hair* twining round his fingers; and then, that it slid smoothly round his neck, and tightened and tightened, and he could not draw his breath; . . . . It was his mother; and she turned away from him . . . (379)

In this book of mothers, Cassy as object, as sentimental mother, and as infanticidal mother demonstrates the problem of motherhood. The mother cannot be maternal and the object of passion in the same space, and so two of her children are taken from her, while the third she kills herself. Giving up both the position of mother and sexual being, she becomes the infanticidal ghost mother. Representing not herself but Simon Legree's dead white mother she enacts another infanticide. Rather than causing the death of an innocent child, however, this time her target is the evil Legree. In this way, Stowe rewrites the story of the impure slave and makes her into the ghost of a white mother who is able to enact the violence that all mothers might wish for. Avenging the mistreated white mother, Stowe puts the slave mother in her place in order to murder the son.

One of the most notorious passages across the Ohio in reality by a slave mother was that of Margaret Garner in 1856. Like Eliza, Garner was a slave mother attempting to escape with her children across the river. Garner's escape also occurred when the Ohio was frozen. But unlike the fictional Eliza, the actual Garner was

captured. Rather than passively resign her children to slavery, she succeeded in slashing the throat of her beloved daughter (providing Toni Morrison with the plot of her revision of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Beloved* [1987]). In the entanglement between the reality of Garner and popular depictions of events from the novel, and the fictions of Stowe, there are three versions of the slave mother's story. Eliza's story is an idealized and fantastic tale where the mother heroically escapes helped by almost divine intercession. Etchings of Eliza's literally hair-raising escape depict both the mother and child as white rather than black, the same color as the thwarted slavers on the bank, changing the slave-catchers into forces of nature instead of people (S. Smith 105). Margaret Garner, the real slave mother, was not only captured, but slashed the throat of her daughter and entreated her own mother to assist her in killing her other children. In passage from reality to fantasy, the real story of a black mother killing children becomes, in Stowe's novel, that of a black mother escaping, and in popular imagination, a white mother escaping. Reading back then from fantasy to reality and switching the positions and colors, we can read a mirror image story of a white mother who kills her child.

Maternal infanticide in slavery allows the mother to keep hold of her child, permitting her to remain as mother *and* allowing her to be free of a child. She can do the right thing, kill the child to save it from slavery, and rid herself of a child. Thus the slave mother (at least in Stowe's book) gets to have it both ways, she is a good mother and a bad mother at the same time. In the traditional Freudian fetish tale the

child sees the mother and denies his castration; in this version of fetishism the mother sees the child and denies her own castration at the same time as she allows herself to remain a mother and retain her child.

Mimicking the fetish narrative where the child holds onto two contradictory beliefs, in this story the mother retains her power and loses it in the same moment. She retains all the benefits in terms of status and social respect accorded to mothers. The completely disempowered position of the slave mother allows for a fantasy by which a good mother, through no fault of her own, exercises the ultimate in maternal control: killing her child precisely because she is powerless and without sacrificing her position as mother. In this way the actual position of the mother in society, subservient and denied, becomes a place from where the mother appears to exert a limited kind of authority. It allows for the wish to kill the child to be not only understandable, but even heroic. A good mother would not want to raise a child in slavery and would prefer her child to go to heaven. Thus killing the child is an act of defiance. Harriet Beecher Stowe's achievement in this novel is not so much that she caused the Civil War as Abraham Lincoln would have it, but rather that she made the murder of children by their own mothers into, if not acceptable behavior, understandable action.

Epilogue

In a recent issue of the feminist journal *differences*, Jonathan Crewe returns to Barbara Johnson's 1987 "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion." In an essay called "Baby Killers," Crewe explains why he waited until 1996 to make his answer to Johnson: "I have used Johnson's essay for several years as a teaching text, suspending question about it that did not seem pressing" (2). Before I comment on Crewe's comments on Johnson, let me attempt to clarify her argument.

Johnson's essay calls for the examination of rhetorical figures as political devices. As an example, Johnson traces the figure of apostrophe's history in light of the political debate over abortion, suggesting an "inherent connection between figurative language and questions of life and death" (184). Johnson reads Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and Baudelaire's "Agathe"--poems which Johnson argues depend upon the "possibility of a new birth or reanimation" (188). Examining a difference between the poems written by men and those written by women who write about motherhood, Johnson makes a compelling case for the asymmetry of male and female access to poetic rhetorical devices. Gwendolyn Brooks, writes Johnson,

> is here rewriting the male lyric tradition, textually placing aborted children in

> the spot formerly occupied by all the dead, inanimate, or absent entities previously addressed by the lyric. And the question of animation and anthropomorphism is thereby given a new and disturbing twist. For if apostrophe is said to involve language's capacity to give life and human form to something dead or inanimate, what happens when those questions are literalized? (189)

Johnson argues that the body of the mother and its capacity to give life cannot be poeticized in the same way by the female poet as by the male poet. For Johnson, pregnancy is a state that disrupts the "epic of separation and self-reliant autonomy" (190). Johnson argues that these poems "exist *because* a child does not" (195). Taking the Keatsian stance that death is the mother of poetry, Johnson suggests that for Adrienne Rich "motherhood...is precisely the death of poetry." She finds that the woman poet has trouble separating from the child in the poem. Johnson maintains :

> While one could undoubtedly find counterexamples on both sides, it is not surprising
>
> that the substitution of art for children should not be inherently transgressive for the male poet. Men have in a sense always had not choice but to substitute something for the literal process of birth. That, at least, is the belief that has long been encoded into male poetic conventions. It ias though male writing were nature procreative, while female writing is somehow by nature infanticidal. (198)

Crewe's difficulty with this argument is twofold. First, "historical difference is fully subsumed under gender difference" (3). His second and more important critique of Johnson causes him to read poems by male poets.

> While these texts presuppose and even emphasize the gendered differences on which Johnson insists, they also reveal the impossibility, even for male poets, of achieving clean natural-cultural/literal-figurative separations along maternal-paternal lines. In these texts, the haunting figure of the dead or specifically "aborted" child becomes the focus of such distress as Johnson sees exclusively in poems written by twentieth-century women. The figure of the dead child, as one of irrepressible literality, compromises figurative autonomy. (4)

Crewe looks at poems by Ben Jonson which first excoriate the Lady Would-Be for taking potions rather than bearing children. Crewe moves from the unborn child killed by the mother to the child who in dying returns to his source and makes the "Mothers wombe thine urne" (quoted in Crewe 8). Crewe describes Jonson's vision of his wife's stillbirth while he is away from home. The distance in apostrophe forces Jonson to fail in performing his paternal role and causes him anxiety. Crewe's contention is that Jonson's dead baby poems indicate that it is not the mother only who exchanges poems for children. Jonson made the same transaction as the female poets that Barbara Johnson describes. Finally, Crewe suggests that the issue of abortion is not a simply female one. Since both men and women live in the "same world", Crewe

believes that reading poems by men and women "might allow a pro-choice politics to be pursued as an enlightened politics in an even fuller sense than the one to which it now lays claim" (21). A more "enlightened" politics would be one which would allow men and women to feel unified on the topics of pregnancy and abortion.

Although Crewe's first critique of Johnson comes from her ahistorical bent, he himself takes Ben Jonson's writing ahistorically. In a note, Crewe admits that it might make more sense to compare Jonson's dead baby poems to those written by women who were his contemporaries. But, says Crewe, "the gender differentials would become only more conspicuous than they are in the nineteenth and twentieth century" (22). Given Crewe's very strong argument that men and women do live in the same world, that so-called pro-life and pro-choice activists also inhabit the same world, it seems interesting that he would avoid looking at the same world that women inhabited with men on the grounds that it was too different.

I will not deny the same world argument, for there would be no point in argument if men and women did not have to live together, or if differing political opinions did not have to be accommodated in the same time and space; that is what politics is all about. I want to suggest that the same world and the same body are, in fact, highly different things. Ben Jonson was able to write one poem excoriating a woman for being unmotherly and other poems which, while they declare his own unpaternal behavior, also serve to make him appear more fatherly in absentia. Jonson was able to express these opposed thoughts, to write a poem where it is wrong for a

woman to kill a baby and other poems which take the place of his mourned children. Jonson was also able to suggest his own responsibility, confident in the knowledge that he was not there.

Crewe demonstrates that Jonson had a *choice* at least poetically. Jonson can write about child death from two directions; he can throw his voice, apostrophize. Barbara Johnson's essay rests upon this ability of the male poet to create a distance between himself and his creation, between his body and his child. Maybe I miss Crewe's point, but it seems to me that he never confronts the real world issue of the body at the heart of Johnson's text, and the issue that for a woman writer writing must take place in a society that idealizes mothers. The woman's body itself is often seen as belonging to a baby, as is her time and her desire. Crewe notes that Jonson's dead baby poems made him appear to be a better father as well as a poet. A father perhaps should be with his child, but it is always an option for fathers, to be or not be, with their children. Jonson's poems operate from a distance both rhetorically and biographically. He is not present at the stillbirth or at the death of his male child. The female poets are, one other or the other, mothers or poets but have trouble maintaining a dual identity. The position of the mother, both physiologically and culturally, makes the distance employed by male poets who are fathers less available to women. The mothers who write the poems the poems that Barbara Johnson writes about cannot position themselves as good mothers within their poems. It is always an either/or for poets who are women.

In this dissertation I have studied the work of both men and women writers on the subject of infanticide. There is a difference. Certainly, Wordsworth and Scott express anxiety about the death of children. For both of these male writers the written word comes to replace the child. Wordsworth's story told by a sea captain upon viewing a thorn tree is not so much a story of child-murder as a story of poetic generation. Scott's story of child-murder is a tale of writing laws. For both, the act of transcribing what was previously unwritable--the plot of the ballad, the story of the missing baby--obsesses the narrator.

But Stowe and Eliot's depictions of infanticide seems to me much more confused than their male precursors. Confusion is not necessarily a bad thing in this case, but perhaps the most accurate way to thing and feel the position of the pregnant mother. In the work of both female authors, the narrator maintains even more distance from the story of infanticide. In both, the woman does confess her crime in her own words and does so in a voice that emerges from within the novels as distinct from that of the narrator. Perhaps the distinction between infanticidal mother and author is one that a female writer of the nineteenth century *had* to make whereas a male writer did not. The woman writing a book when she might well have been nursing a baby, or writing her book in between nursing her baby and changing its diapers, would have been all too aware of the decision to choose one thing over the other. For her the connections would have been too much, the closeness too dangerous.

This problem of choosing is not something that has vanished in the twentieth

century. The insistence on "family values" and the persistence of an ideal of motherhood which is totally at odds with how most mothers live their lives makes this clear. The fact that abortion has been legalized and yet has remained constantly at the heart of political debate ever since illustrates how threatening it is to dissolve the connection between the female and the mother. Even more threatening is the thought that mothers might not wish to be mothers. Anti-abortion activists position the fetus as a baby and the pregnant woman as a baby-killer. Much of the rhetoric that was employed by nineteenth-century reformers to police women is employed today for the same purposes.

Even as Jonathan Crewe claims solidarity with women and suggests that women and men are "subject to common pressures," it seems that the circumstances around the writing of Jonson's verses and even of Crewe's own essay belie this. Ben Jonson was able to operate at a distance and Crewe was able to wait years to formulate a response to Barbara Johnson. The distance in time and space which allowed these men to write their pieces is not an option for the pregnant woman who must make her decisions with neither time nor space of her own.

WORKS CITED

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New York: Oxford UP, 1953.

Aiken, John. *Essay on Song-Writing*. London, 1772.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. New York: A.L. Burt, 1911.

Apter, Emily. *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.

Apter, Emily and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

Aries, Phillipe. *Centuries of Childhood*. London: Penguin, 1973.

Anderson, Carol. "The Power of Naming: Language, Identity and Betrayal in *The Heart of Midlothian*." *Scott in Carnival: Selected papers from the 4th International Scott Conference*. Ed. David Hewitt and J. H. Alexander. Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993. 189-201.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Badinter, Elisabeth. *Mother Love Myth and Reality: Motherhood in Modern History*. New York: Macmillan, 1980.

Bann, Stephen. *The Inventions of History: Essays on the Representation of the Past*. New York: Manchester UP, 1990.

Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*. New York: Pandora, 1994.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and Ed. H. M. Parshley. Intro. Deirdre Bair. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Behlmer, George K. "Deadly Motherhood: Infanticide and Medical Opinion in Mid-Victorian England." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 34:4 (1979): 403-27.

Beiderwell, Bruce. *Power and Punishment in Scott's Novels*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992.

Benjamin, Jessica. *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination.* New York: Pantheon, 1988.

Berry , Laura. "Speaking of Infanticide: George Eliot's Murdered Children." Unpublished paper.

Bentley, Nancy. "White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 65 (Sept. 1993): 501-22.

Bewell, Alan J. "'A Word Scarce Said': Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth's 'Experimental' Poetry of 1797-1798." *ELH* 53:2 (Summer 1986): 357-390.

Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125-33.

Boswell, John. *The Kindness of Strangers.* New York: Vintage, 1988.

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.

Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Brown, Herbert, Ross. *The Sentimental Novel in American 1789-1860.* Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries P, orig. Duke UP 1940.

Burchfield, Robert "An Outline History of Euphemisms in English." *Fair of Speech: The Uses of Euphemism.* Ed. D.J. Enright. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985: 13-31.

Carlisle, Janice. *The Sense of an Audience: Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot at Mid-Century.* Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1981.

Capp, Bernard. "Popular Literature." *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England.* Ed. Reay-Barry. New York: St. Martin's, 1985: 198-243.

Carpenter, Mary. *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History.* Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1986.

Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony and God.* New York: New Directions, 1995.

Child, Francis James, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads.* Boston: Houghton

Mifflin, 1882.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1978.

Chodorow, Nancy and Susan Contratto. "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother." *Rethinking the Family*. Ed. Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom. New York: Longman, 1982.

Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1:4 (Summer 1976): 875-93.

Cockburn, J.S. *Crime in England 1550-1800*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

Coveney, Peter. *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society, A Study of the Theme in English Literature*. London: Penguin, 1967.

Crewe, Jonathan. "Baby Killers." *differences*, Fall 1996.

Dale, Gillian M. "Jeanie Deans, the 'Heart' of Midlothian and Feminist Ethical Theory." *Scott in Carnival: Selected papers from the 4th International Scott Conference*. Eds. David Hewitt and J. H. Alexander. Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993: 202-15.

Dally, Ann. *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal*. New York: Schoken, 1983.

Defoe, Daniel. *Augusta Triumphans: Or, the Way to make London the most flourishing City in the Universe*. London, 1728.

Disraeli, Benjamin. *Sybil; or, The Two Nations*. New York: Knopf, 1934; orig 1865.

Dolan, Frances E. *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England: 1550-1700*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. New York: Penguin, 1982.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Signet, 1969.

Egginton, Joyce. *From Cradle to Grave*. New York: William Morrow, 1989.

Eliot, George. *Adam Bede*. Intro. by Gordon S. Haight. New York: Holt, 1948.

---. *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*. Ed. A.S. Byatt and Nichola Warren. New York: Penguin, 1990.

---. *Felix Holt, the Radical*. Ed. Peter Coveney. New York: Penguin, 1972.

Fildes, Valerie A. *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986.

Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Fleischman, Avrom. *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.

---. *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1980.

Fluck, Winfried. "The Power and Failure of Representation in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *New Literary History* 23:2 (Spring 1992): 319-38.

Freud, Sigmund. *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74.

Friedman, Albert J. *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1982.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *Colored People*. New York: Knopf, 1994.

Gay, Peter. *The Cultivation of Hatred*. New York: Norton, 1993.

Gelpi, Barbara Charlesworth. *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Greaves, George. "Observations on some of the Causes of Infanticide." *Transactions of the*

Manchester Statistical Society 1862-63. Manchester, 1863.

Greenough, James Bradstreet and George Lyman Kittredge. *Words and their Uses in English Speech*. Intro. by Simeon Pott. Boston: Beacon, 1962.

Hanawalt, Barbara. *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.

Helmholz, R.H. "Infanticide in the Province of Canterbury During the Fifteenth Century." *History of Childhood Quarterly* 2:3 (Winter 1975): 379-90.

Higginbotham, Ann. "'Sin of the Age': Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London." *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1989).

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother-Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.

Hoffer, Peter C. and N.E.H. Hull. *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803*. New York: New York UP, 1981.

Hoffert, Sylvia. *Private Matters: American Attitudes Toward Childbearing and Infant Nurture in the Urban North, 1800-1860*. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1989.

Homans, Margaret. *Bearing the Word--Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986.

Huet, Marie-Helene. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Hunter, William. *On the Uncertainty of the Signs of Murder in the Case of Bastard Children*. London. 1818.

Hutchinson, William. *Dissertation on Infanticide, in its relations to Physiology and Jurisprudence*. London. 1820.

Inglis, Tony. " ... And an Intertextual Heart: Rewriting Origins in *The Heart of Midlothian*." *Scott in Carnival: Selected papers from the 4th International Scott Conference*. Eds. David Hewitt and J. H. Alexander. Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993: 216-31.

Irigaray, Luce. "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other." Trans. Helene Vivienne Wenzel. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7:1 (Autumn 1981): 60-

67.

---. "When Our Two Lips Speak Together." Trans. Carolyn Burke. *Signs* 6:1 (1980)

---. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Jacobus, Mary. *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798).* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Johnson, Barbara. *A World of Difference.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Motherhood and Representation.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Karl, Fred. *George Eliot: Voice of a Century.* New York: Norton, 1995.

Kelley, Mary. *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford UP, 1984.

Kellum, Barbara. "Infanticide in the Later Middle Ages." *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1:3 (Winter 1974): 367-88.

Kelly, Mary. *Post-Partum Document.* Boston: Routledge, 1983.

Kermode, Frank. "Literary Fiction and Reality." Reprinted in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction.* Michael Hoffman and Patrick Murphy, eds. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1988: 219-37.

Kermode, Frank and Robert Alter. *The Literary Guide to the Bible.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987.

Kittredge G.L. and H.C. Sargent, eds. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads.* Boston, 1904.

Knoepflmacher, U. C. *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism.* Berkeley: UC Press, 1968.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror.* Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits.* New York: Norton, 1977.

Langbauer, Laurie. *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990.

Langer, William. "Infanticide: A Historical Survey." *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1 (1974): 353-65.

Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1981.

Liu, Alan. *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989.

Lukacs, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Intro. by Frederic Jameson. Trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Malcolmson, R.W. "Infanticide in the Eighteenth Century." *Crime in England, 1550-1800*. Ed. J.S. Cockburn. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

Mannoni, Octave. *Freud*. New York: Pantheon, 1971.

Matus, Jill L. *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity*. New York: Manchester UP, 1995.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

McCracken-Flesher, Caroline. "A Wo/Man for a' That? Subverted Sex and Perverted Politics in *The Heart of Midlothian*." *Scott in Carnival: Selected papers from the 4th International Scott Conference*. Eds. David Hewitt and J. H. Alexander. Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993: 232-44.

Mellor, Anne. *Romanticism and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Miller, D. A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

---. *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Ethics of Reading*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.

Miller, Pamela A. "Hair Jewelry as Fetish." *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishism in Popular Culture*. Ed. Ray B. Browne. Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1982: 89-106.

Monk, Leland. "The Novel as Prison: Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*." *Novel* (Spring 1994).

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* New York: New American Library, 1987.

Nochlin, Linda. "Morisot's *Wet Nurse*: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting." *Women, Art and Power.* New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

Nussbaum, Felicity. *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Owen, W.J.B. ed. *Wordsworth & Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798.* Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.

Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property.* New York: Methuen, 1987.

Parker, Rozsika. *Mother Love/Mother Hate.* New York: Basic Books, 1996.

Percy, Thomas. *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.* New York: Dover, 1966.

Perry, Ruth. "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England." *Eighteenth Century Life* 16:1 (Feburary 1992): 185-213.

Pick, Daniel. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-1918.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.

Piers, Maria W. *Infanticide.* New York: Norton, 1978.

Pollock, Linda A. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England.* Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1988.

--- . *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864.* Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1995.

Richards, Thomas. *The Imperial Archive.* London: Verso, 1993.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born.* 10th Anniversary Edition. New York: Norton, 1986.

Roper, Lyndal. *Oedipus and The Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

Rose, Lionel. *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800-1939.* London: Routledge, 1986.

Rosenblum, Victor G. and Michael L. Budde. "Historical and Cultural Considerations of Infanticide." *Infanticide and the Handicapped Newborn.* Ed. Dennis J. Horan and Melinda Delahoyde. Provo: Brigham Young UP, 1982: 1-16.

Ross, Marlon. "Naturalizing Gender: Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape." *ELH* 53:2 (Summer 1986): 391-410.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile.* New York: Dutton, 1974.

Rowbotham, Sheila. *Hidden from History.* New York: Vintage, 1976.

Ruddick, Sara. "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6:2 (1980): 342-67.

---. *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace.* Botson: Beacon Press, 1989.

Ryan, William Burke. *Infanticide: its law, prevalance, prevention, and history.* London, 1862.

Samuels, Shirley ed. *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century American Culture.* New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Bodily Bonds." in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century American Culture.* Ed. Shirley Samuels. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Historian Novel, 1840-1880.* London: Macmillan, 1978.

Sauer, R. "Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth Century Britain." *Population Studies* 32 (1978): 81-93.

Schor, Naomi. "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand." *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives.* Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986: 363-72.

Scott, Sir Walter. *The Heart of Midlothian.* Preface and Glossary by W.M. Parker. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1956.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.*

New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Shaw, Harry E.. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and his Successors.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983.

Sheats, Paul D. *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973.

Shuttleworth, Sally. "Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era." *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender.* Ed. Linda Shires. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Siegel, Reva B.. "Abortion as a Sex Equality Right: Its Basis in Feminist Theory." Mothers in Law. Eds. Martha Albertson Fineman and Isabel Karpin. New York Columbia UP, 1995.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics.* New York: Oxford UP, 1983.

Smith, Stephanie. *Conceived by Liberty: Maternal Figures and 19th-Century American Literature.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.

Sommerville, John. *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640.* New York: Longman, 1986.

Stang, Richard. *Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870.* New York: Columbia UP, 1984.

Stanton, Domna C. "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva." *The Poetics of Gender.* Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia UP 1986: 157-82.

Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.

Stewart, Susan. "Scandals of the Ballad." *Representations* 32 (Fall 1990): 134-56.

Stoller, Robert. *Representations of Gender.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.* Abridged edition. New York: Harper, 1979.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* New York: Harper, 1965.

Sundquist, Eric J. *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Swann, Karen. "Suffering and Sensation in *The Ruined Cottage*." *PMLA* 106:1 (Jan. 1991): 83-95.

Thompson, Ruthe. "Keeping House." Dissertation in progress, University of Arizona.

Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860.* New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. *The English Novel: Form and Function.* New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

Vincent, David. *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1989.

Wardley, Lynn. "Relic, Fetish, Femmage: The Aesthetics of Sentiment in the Work of Stowe." *Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities* 5:3 (Fall 1992): 165-91.

Warhol, Robyn R. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel.* Berkeley: UC Press, 1957.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966).

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1973.

Wiener, Martin J. *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Winnett, Susan. "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure." *PMLA* 105:3 (May 1990): 505-18.

Wohl, Anthony. *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own.* New York: Harcourt, 1929.

Zelizer, Viviana. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children.* New York: Basic Books, 1985.