

**The Word and the Womb:
Women Writing the Maternal in the Romantic Period**

**By
Dawn-Marie Zampa**

**A thesis submitted to the
College of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Masters of Arts in English Literature
at the University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada
©1999 Dawn-Marie Zampa
All rights reserved**



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-52684-4

Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the works of three British, women Romantic writers in relation to the social and medical constructions of maternity. It is founded on the supposition that images of the maternal body are used to serve a variety of political and ideological goals. The introduction discusses the attempt to recover the lost texts and voices of past literary women, and then shows how maternity intersected with the rhetoric of sensibility prevalent within Romanticism and the ideology of separate spheres. In the second chapter, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus* is placed within the context of the professional rivalry between medical men and midwives. It is asserted that Shelley's text critiques the male usurpation of female, reproductive power, while also revealing an autobiographical anxiety concerning motherhood. Chapter three discusses the works of Ann Yearsley, and how she used her maternal subject position to claim an authority to speak out against class tyranny, oppression and violence. Yearsley's works are put in the context of the French Revolution and the politics of breast-feeding that played out in both France and Britain. Chapter four discusses the poetry of Felicia Hemans. It is argued that the death of the maternal body found so frequently in her works was an artistic response to the increased deaths of women in childbirth in the early nineteenth-century. In a less literal fashion, the destruction or absence of the maternal acts as a subversive critique of a society that does not value and fulfill women's lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Dr. Suzanne Matheson, my thesis advisor, for her helpful suggestions, encouraging words and patience when dealing with me. I would also like to thank my other advisors, Dr. Barrie Ruth Straus and Dr. Mary Louise Drake, for their advice and for giving me a variety of perspectives.

Most of all, I wish to thank my parents for their continued love and support throughout my university education. Last, but not least, thanks to Dan Kresan for helping me out in times of technological crisis, putting up with my general moodiness, and listening to my ramblings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction: Constructing Motherhood within Romantic Sensibility	1
CHAPTER TWO	
Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> : Obstetrics and the Medicalization of Childbirth	9
CHAPTER THREE	
Ann Yearsley: Maternity and the Politics of the Breast	43
CHAPTER FOUR	
Felicia Hemans and the Death of the Maternal Body	78
CHAPTER FIVE	
Conclusion: Forms of Maternal Power	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113
APPENDIX: Glossary	123
VITA AUCTORIS	126

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter Two

2.1	Forceps delivery and a plethora of obstetrical tools, eighteenth-century engraving	14
2.2	Rowlandson, caricature depicting a midwife going to a labour, 1811	16
2.3	Cruikshank etching from S. W. Fores' <i>Man-Midwifery Dissected</i> , 1793	16
2.4	Obstetrical instruments from the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries	19
2.5	From Jacob Rueff's <i>De conceptu et generatione hominis</i> , 1580	28
2.6	From Adrian Spigelius' <i>De Formatu Foetu</i> , 1626	28
2.7	From William Hunter's <i>The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus</i> , Plate IV, 1774	29
2.8	From William Hunter's <i>The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus</i> , Plate VI, 1774	29
2.9	From William Smellie's <i>A Sett of Anatomical Tables</i> , 1754	30

Chapter Three

3.1	Frontispiece to Carolus Linnaeus' <i>Fauna Svecica</i> , 1746	51
3.2	Paris, Foundling Hospital, suckling ward in the late eighteenth-century	54
3.3	Greuze, <i>Le départ de la nourrice</i> , Ca. 1780	54
3.4	Auguste Claude Le Grand, <i>Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou L'Homme de la Nature</i> , Ca. 1785	56
3.5	D. Pellegrini, engraved by M. Bovi, <i>The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison</i> , 1795	63
3.6	Clément, after Boizot, <i>La France Républicaine</i> , Ca. 1790	66
3.7	Charles Cochin and Hubert-Francois Gravelot, <i>Charité</i> , 1791	66
3.8	Marguerite Gérard, <i>Les Premiers Pas ou la Mère Nourrice</i> , Ca. 1800	69

Chapter Four

4.1	Sir Thomas Lawrence, <i>Princess Charlotte during her pregnancy</i> , 1817	93
4.2	Matthew Wyatt, <i>Monument to Princess Charlotte</i> , St. George's Chapel at Windsor, 1821	93
4.3	Engraved frontispiece by Kinnersley of a Corbould design. From Edwin B. Hamilton's <i>A Record of the Life and Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte</i> , 1818	96
4.4	Engraved frontispiece by T. Wallis of a W.M. Craig design. From Thomas Green's <i>Memoirs of Her late Royal Highness Charlotte Augusta of Wales and of Saxe Coburg</i> , 1818	96
4.5	Corpse of Pompeiian encrusted in hard lava, found near the Porta di Nuceria	106

ONE

Introduction: Constructing Motherhood within Romantic Sensibility

This thesis discusses the construction of maternity found in the works of three Romantic, women writers. The three women chosen – Ann Yearsley, Mary Shelley and Felicia Hemans – represent a diversity in maternal experiences, social class and beliefs about the nature of “woman.” The works of Romantic, literary women have been ignored until very recently, despite the fact that they were widely read and influential in their own time period. With the onset of Modernism after World War I, Romantic aesthetics was disparaged as melodramatic and sentimental. Some decades later, scholars, with a new found interest in Romanticism, “rediscovered” and redefined these works. The male Romantics were recanonized, whereas women’s writings were largely ignored and marginalized for lack of sufficient interest. Paula R Feldman, in her recent anthology of Romantic women poets states that by the “1960s five male poets constituted the ‘romantic’ canon. The women were so effectively ‘not there’ that they were even excluded from consideration as ‘minor’ poets” (xxxii). If they were remembered, it was because of their connection to prominent literary men as daughters, wives and sisters. Recently, however, with more women in academia and an interest in new critical approaches such as gender studies, new historicism and various kinds of feminisms, women writers are being given back their voices.

What remains to be seen is how women’s reintegration back into the canon will affect our reconceptualization of Romanticism. Although some critics argue that women’s works should be read separate from men’s works, thereby ensuring that both are

not judged according to a masculine ideology, I tend to disagree. Women's voices are heard most clearly when they are read within and against the dominant culture. Many women wrote during this time period, which is remarkable considering that their culture looked down upon women's literary production. Their works responded to, revised and criticized the texts of prominent men, which cannot be fully appreciated if read in isolation. Stephen C. Behrendt asserts that reading women's writing on its own "prevents us from seeing the ways in which all Romantic writing was affected by the presence of both men and women on the literary scene, and within the cultural dialogue" (100).

It was within the Romantic period that, as Marlon Ross has pointed out in *The Contours of Masculine Desire* (1989), a distinctive women's voice emerged to create a uniquely women's poetic tradition. Ann Mellor, in her *Romanticism & Gender* (1993), distinguishes between what she labels as feminine and masculine Romanticism. She contends that feminine Romanticism differs from its more prominent counterpart by founding itself on community and an ethic of care. These qualities were promoted in the late eighteenth-century, when there occurred a "feminization" of culture. Refined emotion and displays of compassion were valued in both sexes, although primarily linked with women. Women were thought to have a special relationship with sensibility. Janet Todd argues that while "men pursued the practical business of commerce, women became the preservers of the religious values of charity and compassion... To sweeten and enforce this uncomfortable role as moral guardians, a coy sort of gallantry developed. Women became almost invariably the 'fair sex', and open misogyny of the urban Restoration kind was rare" (18). Patriarchal dominance continued, but in a disguised and

sentimental form. Women were elevated as naturally domestic and gentle creatures, and yet remained entirely subordinate.

At the center of this sentimental rhetoric was the image of the benevolent mother. Mothers were valorized as both self-sacrificial and innate nurturers. Images of women breast-feeding and fondly coddling their children abounded in both literature and visual art. The notion of the benevolent mother was politically deployed in an attempt to relegate women to the domestic sphere. Women were told that they had no place within public life, but within their own domestic havens they could be “Queens.” Lawrence Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800* (1977), attributes this new sensibility around the figure of the mother, and more generally around the family, to lower infant mortality. Although infant mortality may not have been as high as in previous centuries, it was thought at that time that the population was decreasing. Historian Linda Colley writes that a “cult of prolific maternity was immensely attractive to those who believed (as many did before the introduction of a census in 1800) that Britain’s population was in decline, and to those who simply wanted more live births so that the nation might better compete in terms of cannon-fodder with France” (240). The rhetoric of sensibility surrounding maternity was fueled by the state’s need for more citizens and a desire for economic and military expansion. The idealization of the domesticated woman and the ideology of separate spheres sought to keep British women contented with the traditional role of motherhood.

Texts written by women concerning maternity have been almost completely erased. This is because women were primarily “written as mothers” through patriarchal institutions. There was an unprecedented amount of texts devoted to the topics of

fertility, the maternal body, obstetrics, breast-feeding and infant care. These texts sought to manage and control a body constructed as “undisciplined” and at the mercy of natural forces. It is no accident that lying-in hospitals were created at the same time that male doctors took over the field of obstetrics from midwives. As women were trained to acquiesce to the medical establishment and the so-called “experts,” their voices were effectively silenced. What filled this gap was the idealization of the maternal as a way to naturalize women’s subordination.

Although lower-class women did not have the luxury to stay at home, the majority of women from the new bourgeois and upper-classes did subscribe to the ideology of separate spheres. Women, however, had found a way to make the ideology of separate spheres work for them. Colley states that although the cult of female propriety and domesticity did restrict and oppress women, it also provided women with unexpected benefits. Women were able to evoke their supposed moral superiority to assert their right to intervene in political matters. The sensibility movement had stressed that there was a direct correlation between civic virtue and the family. Colley explains that “if politics was indistinguishable from morality... then surely women as guardians of morality must have some right of access to the political” (274). Women were able to manipulate this rhetoric for their own purposes, which is evident in the works of women writers who used their maternal subject position to claim authority.

The double-edged sword of separate spheres and sentimental rhetoric can be seen in the anthologies of women’s writings produced at that time. Writing for publication is a form of public activity, so how did women reconcile the idealization of a domestic woman with public production, and in some cases public success? As Todd notes, the

idealization of women as passive “ appears much at odds with their energy in one area of activity: literary enterprise” (20-1). Although literary women did have their critics, many others supported women’s “unique” contribution to literary production. By the end of the Romantic movement, George Bethune in *The British Female Poets: with Biographical and Critical Notices* (1848), was able to write that it is consistent with woman’s “delicate and more sensitive faculties” that her “genius... should yield peculiar delight when its themes are love, childhood, the softer beauties of creation, the joys or sorrows of the heart, domestic life, mercy, religion, and the instincts of justice. Hence her excellence in the poetry of the sensibilities” (iv). Evident in this passage is the naturalization of women as gentle, nurturing and domestic, which necessarily curtailed what was viewed as the “proper” topics for women’s writings. At the same time, however, Bethune writes that what the “elevation of woman has done for the reform of social manners, her educated mind is doing for our books” (v). Bethune, whether he was conscious of it or not, was widening the scope of women’s influence. Women were able to evoke their authority as social reformers to involve themselves in matters outside the domestic realm.

This thesis explores the tensions between the domestic and public evident in the writings of women. Through the idealization of the home, mothers became the primary focus of sentimental rhetoric. The three following chapters discuss the ways in which literary women constructed maternity and the maternal body within and against the dominant culture. In an attempt to demonstrate how the different elements of culture mutually support political ideologies, the methodological approach has become multi-disciplinary. Examinations into historical, artistic, medical, scientific and literary factors all stem from the assumption that motherhood is political. The first work to be dealt with

is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). This text is discussed before the work of Ann Yearsley, despite chronology, because of the way it foregrounds issues and contextualizes later discussions. By depicting a scientist who negates the need for a female body in the production of offspring, this work critiques the technologies that usurp female reproductive power. *Frankenstein* was written at a time when medical men had taken over the office of midwifery from women, and the maternal body was seen in increasingly mechanistic terms. Through technological intervention, medical men sought to control and discipline the maternal body. Women, however, countered these attempts at regulation through their assertion of the power of the mother's imagination to impress itself onto the fetus. This was a limited form of power, since it linked women's imagination with the probability of producing monsters. It did, however, assert the biological link women maintain with their growing offspring. This chapter, then, outlines the professional rivalry between midwives and medical men which is important for an understanding of the debates surrounding the maternal body. It also demonstrates how the sentimental rhetoric concerning women's biological link to the fetus could be invoked to serve different political goals.

The next chapter deals with the works of the labouring-class poet Ann Yearsley. An analysis of her texts show how issues of class and nation intersected with concerns over maternity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had popularized the notion that maternity was a woman's national duty, and valorized maternal breast-feeding. His advocacy of maternal breast-feeding corresponded with the celebration of it found in the scientific and medical treatises of Carolus Linnaeus and William Cadogan. After the upheaval of the French Revolution, and women's early involvement in political events, mandatory

maternal nursing became a way to enforce women's relegation to the domestic sphere and their adherence to traditional gender roles. Yearsley uses the sentimentality cultivated to keep women within their homes as a way to claim moral superiority. By appealing to her maternal subject position, she gives herself authority to justify her critique of oppression, militarism, and tyranny. Yearsley speaks out for equality between the classes and social change without violence.

The last chapter discusses the works of Felicia Hemans, who is primarily known for her celebration of mothers as innately nurturing and self-sacrificial. Her depiction of the maternal seems at first to be at odds with the premise of this thesis -- that the maternal subject position did accord women some measure of power. Although Hemans' work does celebrate domesticity and filial bonds, it represents the maternal as frequently at odds with state interests. Mothers are either conspicuously absent or are in the act of dying. The fact that mothers cannot exist harmoniously within the social structure becomes a subversive critique of society. The depiction of the dead or dying mother also reflects the statistics that show that more women were dying in childbirth in the early nineteenth-century than in the eighteenth. The most famous case of course being that of Princess Charlotte. For Hemans, the Princess's status as royal member and expectant mother represents both the private and public spheres. Through her appeal to maternal sentiment, Hemans is able to conflate the private and public.

The Word and the Womb is founded on the supposition that the maternal body is a politically contested terrain. The image of the maternal was, and still is, evoked and reconceptualized for various ideological purposes. The second half of the eighteenth-century saw the beginning of a new sentimentality around maternity which sought to

restrict women to the domestic realm. At the same time a proliferation of medical tracts appeared that attempted to regulate the maternal body and bring fertility under the control of patriarchal institutions. This thesis attempts to show that the cultural dialogue concerning maternity was not entirely one-sided. Literary women responded to and reacted against the various forms of cultural production that defined motherhood. Appropriating the rhetoric of sensibility, they subversively critiqued the masculine dominance it was founded upon. Maternity has long been the site of political controversies and debate, and the more knowledge we have into how the maternal was constructed in the past, the more capable we will be in our current and future debates.

TWO

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Obstetrics and the Medicalization of Childbirth

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) can be viewed as a story of birth that conflates the issues of parental origin, monstrosity and authorship. The process of creation – whether biological or artistic – is central to Shelley's critique of patriarchal authority. Her concern over the role of motherhood in a society that subjugates women is expressed in a narrative that foresees the horrific consequences of a motherless creation. In the novel, the absence or death of mothers both symbolizes an autobiographical anxiety over the role of motherhood and critiques the diminishing role of women in the birth experience. By the time Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, technology and the male-midwife had almost completely taken over the traditionally female-sanctioned realm of birth. A wide range of discursive practices came together in the eighteenth-century in an attempt to regulate the maternal body. Pregnancy and birth became the subjects of intense social scrutiny for the first time. Prior to this time mothers were primarily subject to religious authority, but now there were numerous medical specialists they were expected to submit to. In response to attempts to regulate the maternal body, Shelley draws on folklore that attributes the female imagination with the power to (de)form the fetus. The female imagination, with its ability to undermine authority, became a subversive threat to patriarchal claims of the male's sole ownership of the fetus, scientific knowledge and the literary tradition. This power, however, was a limited one since the female imagination was bound up with the notion of monstrosity.

The phenomenon of birth is a biological reality that is also socially constructed. As such, one of the most profound shifts in the construction of childbirth was the view of it as natural to the belief in the pathology of birth, which insisted on technological intervention. Until the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth-century, birth was viewed as a natural process that women helped each other through. Childbirth was the domain of women, with specialized rituals that created a shared bond between them. Midwives attended all births, and it was their duty to call in a barber-surgeon when they decided there was a medical emergency. It is important to emphasize the point that the midwife was imbued with the power to determine when birth became medically dangerous, and warranted the intrusion of a male surgeon. The male's presence meant that the woman and/ or baby were in need of special medical assistance since men did not attend normal births. Surgeons would use instruments such as hooks, crochets and knives to extract the baby at all costs. Craniotomies were performed to extract dead fetuses or sometimes live babies in extremely difficult labours. The results were always fatal for the baby and usually for the mother. Although this procedure, and others like it, were done in the benevolent attempt to save the mother's life, the unskilled use of primitive equipment meant that intervention was more deadly than it was helpful.

This changed considerably in the eighteenth-century when male-midwives used the newly invented forceps. Although Peter Chamberlen had invented forceps in the seventeenth-century, the design remained a family secret that allowed generations of Chamberlen medical men to attend royal births. However, by about 1725-1730, various designs of forceps were independently created by other male-midwives. Hooks and so forth were removed from instruments, and in their place were two levers that could safely

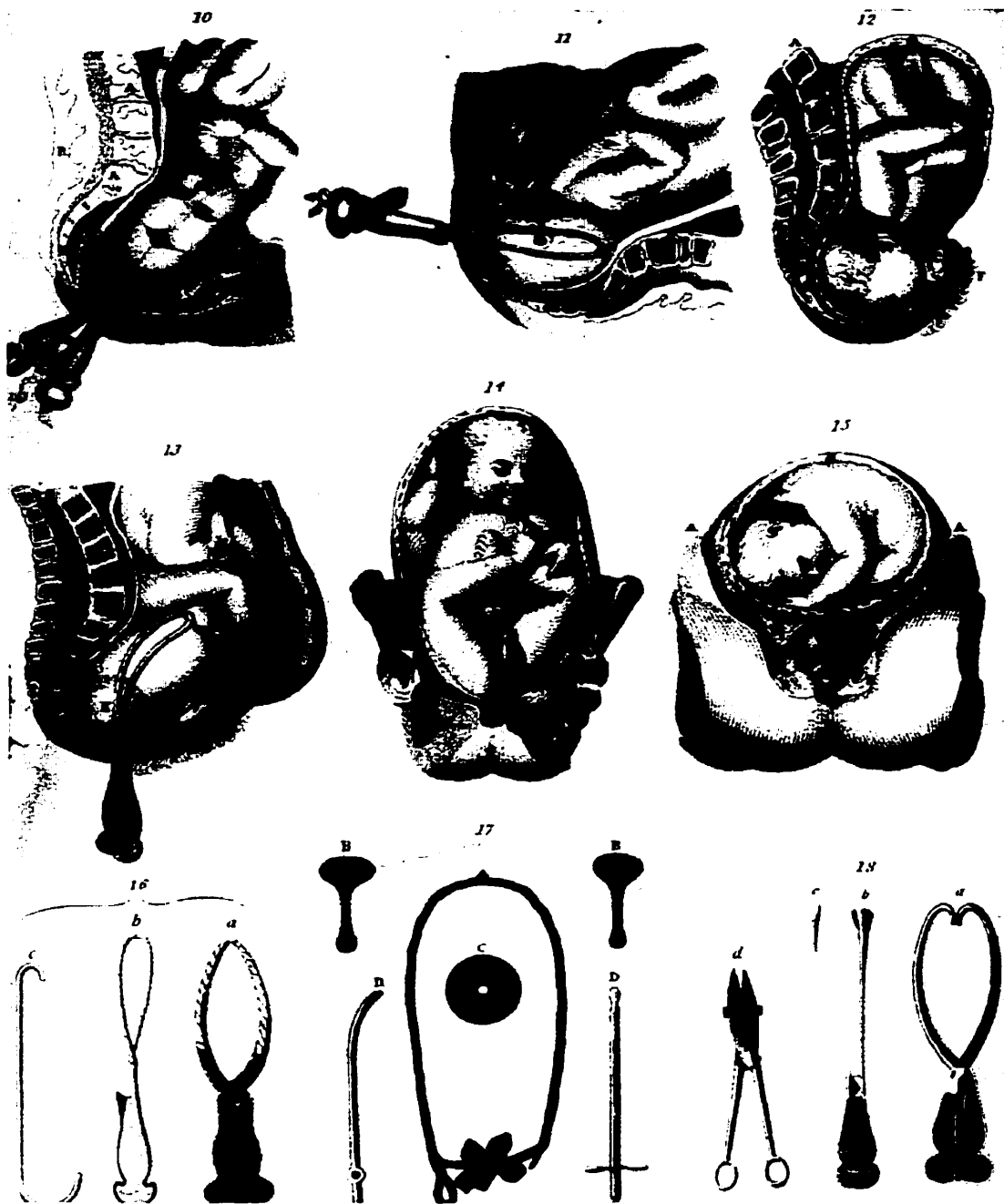
guide the head over the perineum. Surgeons were no longer the bringers of death, but the potential for a safe delivery in abnormal circumstances. Although the creation of forceps is a landmark in obstetric history, this technological advance itself cannot alone explain the male take-over of midwifery. William Ray Arney asserts that “forceps accelerated the decline of the midwife, but this decline was facilitated by the conceptually unsettling influence of ‘scientific midwifery’ imported earlier from France” (27). In the seventeenth-century, French rationalism and the Cartesian view of the body as a machine crossed the Channel to herald in a social reorganization of midwifery.

Before the Scientific Revolution, an organic view predominated in which the body was seen as a vitalistic force that existed in a holistic union with the earth. Women’s bodies were viewed as possessing a special bond with nature because the processes of gestation, birth and lactation tie them more closely to the processes of birth, death and renewal found in the natural world. A dichotomy was established in which men were equated with culture and women with nature (Ortner 66). Although nature was seen as debased when compared to the spiritual heights attained by the male mind, the female body was regarded with a certain reverence and mystique for symbolizing the “unknowable” quality of generativity. With the Scientific Revolution, the natural world lost its spiritual dimension and was constructed as a passive object that could be exploited for resources, mastered and controlled. As Carolyn Merchant explains, nature was no longer seen as a nurturing mother and active teacher, but rather as “a mindless, submissive body” (190). The maternal body remained in the realm of nature whereas the process of birth was re-conceptualized as technological so that it could enter the domain of men. The connection between woman and nature is apparent in *Frankenstein* when

Victor states that he “pursued nature to her hiding places” (Shelley 54), which mimics his professor’s Baconian belief that scientists should “penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places” (Shelley 47). In these passages, scientific inquiry actively seeks out the mystery of reproduction. Nature as a symbol of the female body is aggressively subdued and violated.

In the eighteenth-century, the Cartesian metaphor of the body as a machine was applied to females. Taking women out of their traditional place within nature was a dangerous venture within a patriarchal society, since it gave women a symbolic position within culture that they could use to gain access to cultural power. However, this subversive potential was minimized by the fact that women were still seen as the inferior model. The Cartesian view of the body as a machine, then, took the male as its norm. Robbie E. Davis-Floyd, in discussing the technocratic model of birth, states that the female body insofar as it “deviated from the male standard... was regarded as abnormal... and dangerously under the influence of nature, which, due to its unpredictability and its occasional monstrosities, was itself regarded as inherently defective and in need of constant manipulation by man” (301). As male-midwives attempted to assert their authority over unproblematic deliveries, they promulgated a theory that viewed the maternal body as a defective machine that needed to be rescued from its perilous associations with nature, and then brought in line with the current technological world-view through mechanical manipulation. The new scientific rhetoric, then, legitimized the male-midwife’s technological intervention in an otherwise natural event.

By placing her novel in the eighteenth-century, Shelley contextualizes her work at the height of the professional rivalry between the sexes. The battle was over who, if at all anyone, had the right to control the process of birth. Elizabeth Nihell in her *Treatise on the Art of Midwifery* (1760) attacks male-midwifery for its fatal over-use of instruments. She asserts that some men use these instruments to impress the patient and her family with his supposed superior skill, which can have detrimental outcomes. Whether or not these claims are true is not as important as Nihell's appeal to the "naturalness" of the birthing woman. Her attacks were aimed at the pre-eminent William Smellie, known as the "master" of British midwifery. In Smellie's *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (1756), he likens the birthing woman to a machine that can be manipulated through obstetrical technique [fig 2.1]. In his role as an educator to future midwives he created what Nihell called an "automation or machine" of a pregnant woman's anatomy. It was made of wood with a leather belly and an animal's bladder filled with beer, which was stopped with a cork. Inside the bladder was a wax-doll that was put into various positions to replicate the possible positions of a fetus. In her disapproval of Smellie's midwifery classes, Nihell criticizes the fact that a person could become a midwife in nine lessons practicing on this "curious machine," without any experience with actual pregnancies or deliveries. Smellie, in contrast, states that midwives ought to "perform with his own hands upon proper machines" (430). Underlining this comment is the view that an actual woman could never be a "proper machine." The female body is seen as inherently defective, and therefore birth is always a dangerous process. Although, like Nihell, Smellie also cautions about the over-use of instruments, implicit in his arguments



2.1 An eighteenth-century engraving depicting a forceps delivery and a plethora of obstetrical tools. Reprinted from Robbie E. Davis-Floyd's "The Technocratic Model of Birth." *The Medicalization of Obstetrics: Personnel, Practice, and Instruments*. Ed. Philip K. Wilson. Vol 2 of *Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America 1600 to the Present*. New York: Garland, 1996. 247-76. 5 vols.

is the belief that all pregnancies are potentially pathological and therefore in need of obstetric intervention.

There was quite a bit of sensationalism on both sides of the professional debate. Nihell described the supposed large hands of a man-midwife as “the delicate fist of a great horse god-mother of a he-midwife” (Speert 75). She continued to label Smellie’s disciples as “broken barbers, tailors, or even pork butchers... who, after passing half his life in stuffing sausages, is turned an intrepid physician and man-midwife... and what are those arms by which they maintain themselves, but those instruments, those weapons of death!” (Speert 75). Supporters of medical men retaliated by charging midwives with cruelty and ignorance. Supposedly midwives kept their patients drunk during labour, made them run up and down stairs, or would shake them violently to hasten contractions. There were many caricatures of drunken midwives [fig 2.2], which would continue well into the nineteenth-century with Charles Dickens’ depiction of Mrs. Gamp in his *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4). It is not possible for historians to accurately piece together a picture since both sides obviously exaggerated for rhetorical purposes. Jean Donnison asserts that there were incompetent midwives and rash medical men, but “there is no way of knowing to what extent their negligence or malpractice was reflected in the maternal death-rate” (12). Both sides used various strategies in an attempt to make the other look bad.

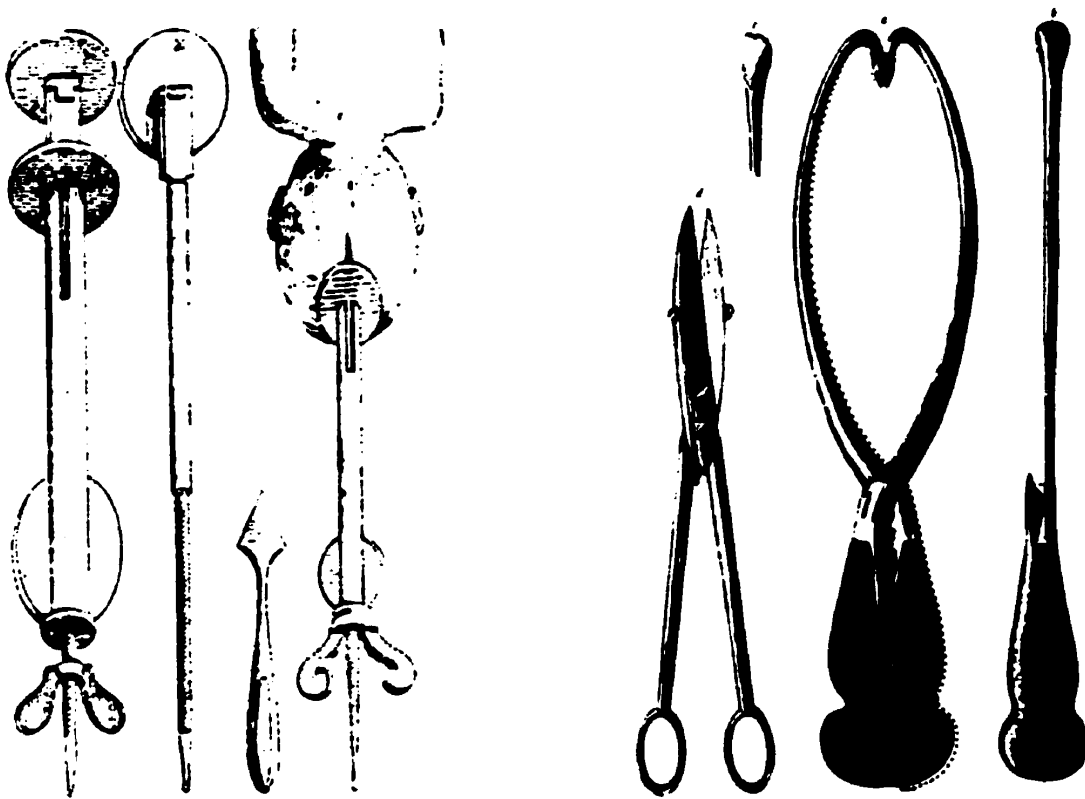
The debates centered around female modesty, nature verses art, and job security. Hostility towards male midwives not only came from female practitioners, but also from leading medical men and the general public. There was the fear that a male midwife would take advantage of his position and become a sexual predator. Midwifery debates

were so culturally prevalent that they soon became the topic of satirical prints. The plate from S.W. Fores' *Man-Midwifery Dissected* (1793) depicts a man-midwife with the potions behind him that he allegedly used to stimulate sexual desire in female patients [fig 2.3]. Underneath the bottles is the line, "this shelf for my own use." The concern over female modesty and chastity was heightened by the only case that was made public. In it, the man-midwife, Dr. Morley, was convicted of seducing a patient and forced to pay compensation to the husband in the amount of one thousand pounds (Donnison 31, Porter 222).

Besides this more sensationalist aspect of the debate, there were also disagreements about how midwifery should be practiced. Nihell had maintained that women had more patience to wait on nature during a labour, whereas medical men interfered with "art." In his critique of Nihell's *Treatise*, Tobias Smollett writes that any person with proper knowledge of the "human machine... know[s] that there are lusus, irregularities, and disorders, for which nature has made no provision; and which, if left to nature... will infallibly occasion the death of both mother and child" (192). Nihell, in turn, accused medical men of using instruments to save their time and to justify charging the patient more money. For what the controversy really came down to for Nihell was job security. Through the invention of instruments, the man-midwife was usurping the office that "rightfully" belonged to women. Nihell feared that the day would come when there would be no midwives left to employ. This same fear was expressed in the writings of Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) she writes, "I am afraid the word midwife, in our dictionaries, will soon give place to *accoucheur*" (218).

Although there were no laws in England that forbade midwives from using instruments, the majority chose not to because instruments in general were regarded as potentially destructive. Although forceps were safe in comparison to older devices, they still had a crude design that lacked a pelvic tilt and sometimes scalped the baby or seriously damaged the mother's tissue. Male-midwives, however, maintained the position that birth was a technological process requiring medical expertise and intervention if a safe delivery was to be achieved. The medicalization of birth can be seen in the proliferation of obstetrical tools in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [fig 2.4]. Through this position, medical men were able to gain control over not only difficult deliveries but normal births as well.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be seen as a representation of the ultimate form of male usurpation of natural, female reproduction. Victor creates life to the exclusion of women. As a consequence, birth is no longer a natural process. Rather, life is re-created through medical technology and professionalism. It is significant that Shelley leaves the actual mechanics of the creation scene out of the text, although all of the action stems from this pivotal moment. The act of creation is so horrific that it becomes textually unrepresentable. The unnaturalness of Victor's solitary propagation is so terrifying that even he cannot reenact it with the female monster. She would undermine his authority to independent masculine creation since, for him, she represents untamed female sexuality and fecundity. He not only fears that she will procreate with her male counterpart, but may force herself onto human men. Victor worries that she may "turn with disgust from him [male monster] to the superior beauty of man" (Shelley 165). What is particularly revealing is Victor's belief that she may be "ten thousand times more malignant than her



2.4 Obstetrical instruments from the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. These instruments include piercers, destructive scissors and double curved crotchets used to perforate and extract a fetal head in a difficult labour. Reprinted from Harold Speert's *Iconographia Gyniatrica: A Pictorial History of gynecology and Obstetrics*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1973.

mate” (Shelley 165), and that the male monster would loath her monstrosity more precisely because it is “in the female form” (Shelley 165).

The female monster is all the more terrifying for Victor because of her reproductive powers. He fears that through her a “race of devils would be propagated upon the earth” (Shelley 165). In his need to control reproduction, he destroys the female monster, thereby destroying the potential for female fecundity symbolized through her. In a more intimate fashion, he also destroys his own chances at natural reproduction since his destruction of the female is what prompts the monster to retaliate by murdering Elizabeth. In this reading, Victor represents scientific claims to control birth through a type of eugenics program. The monstrous body of woman lies before him, and fearing that he cannot control her reproductive powers, he must erase her out of the process. Victor’s creation of his monster, achieved to the exclusion of the female body, attempts to place birth completely within the realm of science and culture. Birth first became a technological process through the invention of tools and machines created to aid the birth process, and Victor’s procreative autonomy completes this trend by eliminating the woman’s body and thereby eliminating any perilous associations of birth to nature.

Victor’s creation is an extension of Enlightenment goals, which sought to control and manipulate the natural world for the “benefit” of science. Shelley critiques Victor’s ambition by identifying it as unnatural not only because it seeks to eliminate the female body, but also because it conflates the bounds between life and death. His monster is created through a “spark of life,” or electricity, which Shelley associates with galvanism. In her 1831 introduction she writes, “Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things” (9). Galvanism works against nature, and tries to restore

life where there is decay. It represents scientific investigation as something opposed to and at odds with nature. Thus, when Victor creates life through galvanism he completes the trend to displace a natural model of birth, which is based on the female body, with a medical and technological model. Shelley makes this displacement evident by linking Victor's workshop to a womb-like space. His "workshop of filthy creation" is described as a "solitary chamber, or rather cell... separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase" (Shelley 55). It is also significant that this solitary chamber is positioned at the "top of the house" (Shelley 55), since the creation springs from Victor's scientific, mind-womb. His laboratory replaces the need for a biological womb. Not only does this enclosed womb-like space mimic female reproductive features, but it is also the creature's place of origin and where he is imbued with life.

Victor's workshop is described as filthy and horrid because it is an unnatural parody of female reproduction. Fred V. Randel notes that no woman ever enters Victor's laboratory, "and no mention is made of any contact between Frankenstein and a female during the time that he works there" (530). In fact, Victor denies all his social ties. He tells Walton, "my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent" (Shelley 55). He fails to respond to the beauty of nature, to his friends, family and his fiancé. Victor denies human attachment, and in this sense he denies in himself the feelings of affection that are traditionally viewed as feminine. His unnatural form of creation renounces the need not only for a biological mother but also for a more abstract feminine influence. Anne K. Mellor summarizes this view when she writes, "it is this separation of masculine work from the domestic affections that causes

Frankenstein's downfall" (116). Victor can produce offspring through the labour of his mind, but he is incapable of loving and caring for his creation.

In the context of the medical profession's control and manipulation of birth, Shelley's novel predicts that if this trend continues, there will come a time when scientists by-pass the need for women in reproduction altogether. There is a disturbing progress from Smellie teaching obstetrics to students with machine-like women to Victor's replacing the womb entirely with the technologies of science. A progression, it might be added, that has continued to this day. By appropriating the womb, Victor has taken away women's traditional source of cultural power. Shelley makes the consequences of his solitary, paternal propagation frightfully clear. Victor may be able to mimic a woman's ability to create life, but he is absent of the feelings of love and compassion necessary to a maternal role. He abandons his creature and takes no responsibility for its upbringing.

Another view that critics propose is that Shelley describes Victor's womb-like workshop in negative terms because it expresses her own anxiety over childbirth. Shelley's mother died of puerperal fever shortly after giving birth to her, and just prior to the writing of *Frankenstein* her own newly-born daughter died. Shelley's text is bound up in her own complex relationship, and unresolved conflicts, with the role of motherhood. Like the creature, she too was born motherless. Shelley read the account of her mother's death in William Godwin's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*. The memoirs, unconventional for the time, describe Wollstonecraft's experience of childbirth in detail. She was determined to have her delivery attended by a woman, and Godwin notes that she thought the "proper business of a midwife... is to sit by and wait for the operations of

nature, which seldom, in these affairs, demand the interposition of art" (113).

Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft's case did demand intervention since she had retained the placenta. A male-midwife was called in who "immediately proceeded to the extraction of the placenta, which he brought away in pieces, till he was satisfied that the whole was removed" (Godwin 113-4). The doctor, however, was wrong in his assessment. There remained a part of it that adhered to the uterine wall. As a result, Wollstonecraft died of a fever caused through infection.

It is an understatement to assert that it must have been difficult for Shelley to read this account of her mother's suffering and death. Wollstonecraft had taken on mythic proportions for Shelley, "colored by a certain spirit of sainthood and martyrdom which existed in the Godwin house because of her mother's fame and untimely death" (Rubenstein 188). U.C. Knoepflmacher argues that Shelley felt an unconscious guilt for her mother's death, which she expressed through her "lifelong desire to compensate her father for the loss of his exquisite first wife and their short-lived marital happiness" (92). Death was pervasive through Shelley's early married years. First there was the suicide of her half-sister Fanny Imlay, and then Percy's first wife, Harriet Shelley, drowned herself while pregnant with another man's child. Then Shelley's own baby daughter died two weeks after a premature birth. Marc A. Rubenstein suggests that the child's death was quickly erased from conscious memory, and that the entire novel "may be viewed as a guilty restitution of this lost baby" (168). Shelley metaphorically re-conceived in an attempt to replace her first "lost child." This view can be supported through Shelley's own linking of her literary production with procreation, and through the concentric narrative structure which, like Victor's laboratory, is womb-like.

Ellen Moers concludes that because of the proximity between birth and death in Shelley's life, the two became "hideously intermixed" (84). At its most basic level, it is the image of the mother that stands for this fusion of life and death. The mother is both bearer of life and breeder of death. As Paul Youngquist writes, "Born free we are born fated, fettered to a dying animal" (355). He goes on to argue that the exclusion of mothers in *Frankenstein* is an expression of Shelley's conflictual attitude towards motherhood as an impure paradox of life and death. Shelley's critique of Victor's solitary propagation as an attempt to negate the female body is thus "underwritten by a fantasy of female exemption from the contagion of sexual contact" (Youngquist 353). The figure of Caroline Beaufort is at once, an idealized rendition of Shelley's mother, and a symbol of the mother's proximity to death. A paragon of domestic and maternal virtue, she dies through her act of mothering. She takes Elizabeth in as her own daughter, and when Elizabeth catches scarlet fever, Caroline insists on attending her despite the arguments against it. Shelley writes that "Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver" (42). Caroline dies through her actions as a mother.

The connection between the maternal body and death is quite literally represented through the various portraits of Caroline Beaufort. When Victor returns home from Geneva the first thing he sees is a painting of his mother "in an agony of despair, kneeling by the coffin of her dead father" (Shelley 78). Underneath this painting is a miniature of the murdered William. Youngquist states that the positioning of William's portrait underneath the painting of his mother emphasizes the point that "motherhood creates a lineage of death" (355). In another image of Caroline Beaufort, the relationship

between motherhood and death is brutally recreated. After murdering William, the monster takes the miniature of Caroline and places it in the folds of Justine's dress while she sleeps. Youngquist asserts that the fatal aspects of the mother "emerge indirectly in the use to which the monster puts the miniature. For the image of Caroline Beaufort becomes the evidence that seals the fate of the innocent Justine" (355). In both these instances Caroline is literally absent from the text, existing in it only figuratively as a portrait. These portraits represent the ideal image of the maternal through their beauty, and yet they betray the connection that the maternal has to death. The maternal body stresses the fatal materiality of all life, which is perhaps the reason why it must remain only an image and ghostly presence within the novel.

Rubenstein states that *Frankenstein* is "a parable of motherhood" (165), which can be changed to "a parable of the absent mother." Shelley implicitly criticizes Victor's usurpation of natural, female reproduction by exposing his society as one that destroys the maternal. This is symbolically enacted in his dream just following the animation of his creature. In it, his fiancé is transformed into his dead mother. He states,

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health... Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips... her features appeared to change, and I thought I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel (Shelley 58).

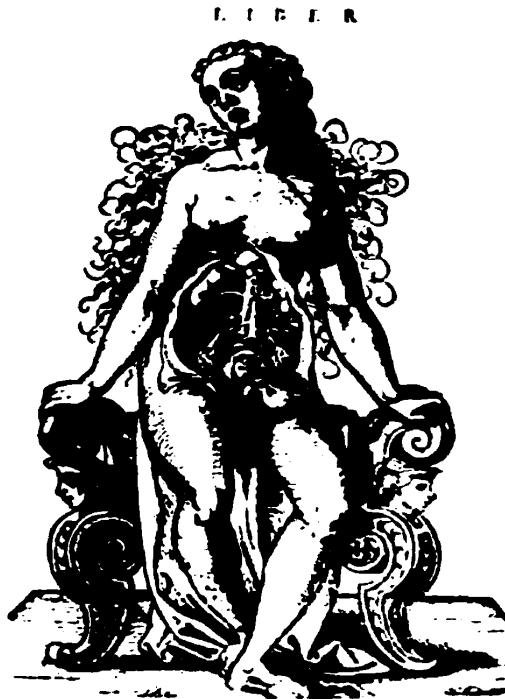
Although Youngquist asserts that Victor's dream reveals the common origin of life and death through the figure of the mother (348), it does this by keeping the maternal safely in the realm of the imaginary. She must remain symbolically dead, for it is the literalization of her body that threatens his power. Victor must symbolically kill off the mother so that he can legitimate his own act of solitary creation. This act of violence is

more literally enacted when the monster revenges the destruction of his female mate by murdering Victor's bride on their wedding night. In other words, the monster eliminates Victor's chances at natural reproduction by killing Elizabeth before she has a chance to become a mother. Both the murder of Elizabeth and the dismemberment of the creature's future mate show that mothers have no place in Victor's society. After Elizabeth's murder he embraces the corpse as he did in his dream. This can be read as his incestuous desire to possess the lost mother. What he desires is to control and possess the reproductive capacities that the mother signifies. He destroyed the female monster for fear that she would propagate "a race of devils" (165), and uses his creature as a tool in his unconscious desire to kill the mother. Mellor writes that when the creature kills Elizabeth he becomes "the instrument of... [Victor's] most potent desire: to usurp female reproductive power so that only men may rule" (122). Victor fears female sexuality and the reproductive ability it represents. In order to control reproduction he uses the technologies of science to eliminate the need for the female body, and then symbolically kills the mother to legitimize this take-over.

Shelley's text narrates the gradual displacement of the female in the birth process. Ironically, it was the same historical moment when the maternal body came under intense social regulation that it was being written out of the picture. In medical texts, the birthing woman herself is of least concern. Obstetrical treatises tended to focus on procedures and how to use various tools. The mother is only discussed in terms of how her body interferes or prevents a healthy delivery. It is not the mother's labour that is focused on, but rather the actions of her medical attendants. The absence of the maternal figure from medical texts is disturbingly depicted in anatomical drawings of the eighteenth-century.

Two influential works are William Smellie's *A Sett of Anatomical Tables* (1752) and William Hunter's *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774). Both books of anatomical illustrations depict the maternal body as amputated and mutilated. The layers of her tissue are pulled away to reveal a fetus. Hunter's illustrations were in fact drawn from dissected corpses in different stages of pregnancy. L.J. Jordanova states that the mother's truncated legs resemble "chunks of meat... between the full vitality of life and the total decay of death" (388). The realistic treatment of the subject with close anatomical detail differs from earlier anatomical drawings.

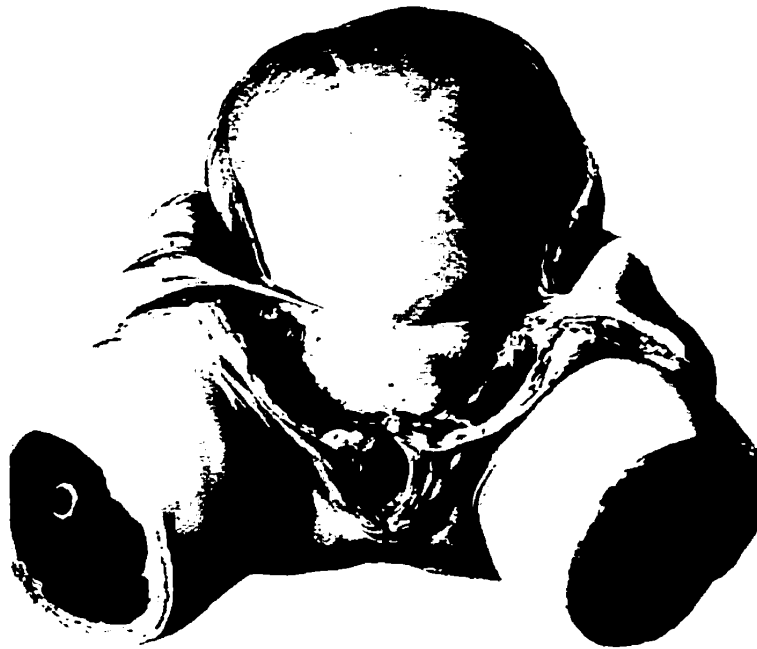
Jordanova correctly asserts that one major change in these illustrations from earlier ones lies in the depiction of the fetus. Earlier anatomies showed the fetus floating in an enormous cavity, whereas eighteenth-century drawings depicted the fetus intertwined into the mother's body. Jordanova concludes that these illustrations "convey an almost oppressive intimacy between mother and child" (406). This seems to beg the question of what kind of mother is being represented. These butchered torsos do not represent a maternal intimacy with the infant but rather the absence of maternal integrity. These mothers are not depicted as people, but as dislocated body parts ready for dissection. Earlier depictions included the entire body of the woman [figs 2.5 & 2.6]. In Hunter's works, however, mothers are fragmented, dissected, with external genitals cut away [figs 2.7 & 2.8]. In Smellie's text, the mother is completely absent except for her uterine walls [fig 2.9]. The emphasis is on the fetus and the use of obstetrical tools by medical men. The mother has all but disappeared. The mysteries of generation, symbolized by the maternal body, have been replaced with a concern over technological know-how.



- 2.5 From Jacob Rueff's *De Conceptu et generatione hominis*, 1580. An Inaccurate but artistic illustration of a pregnant woman. Reprinted from Harold Speert's *Iconographia Gyniatrica: A Pictorial History of Gynecology and Obstetrics*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1973.



- 2.6 From Adrian Spigelius' *De Formatu Foetu*, 1626. Here the fetus is depicted as growing out of the woman's body like a flower. Reprinted from Peggy Phelan's *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. New York: Routledge, 1997.



2.7 From William Hunter's *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, Plate IV, 1774. This drawing's realism makes it disturbing in its portrayal of a woman's butchered body. Reprinted from L.J. Jordanova's "Gender, generation and science: William Hunter's obstetrical atlas." *William Hunter and the eighteenth-century medical world*. Eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 385-412.



2.8 From William Hunter's *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, Plate VI, 1774. Note the contrast in representation between the child's body, which is treated tenderly, and the mother's body which appears dissected and mutilated. Reprinted from the same text as above.



2.9 From William Smellie's *A Set of Anatomical Tables*, 1754. Note that in both instances the mother's body is made irrelevant. Reprinted from Harold Speert's *Iconographia Gyniatrica: A Pictorial History of Gynecology and Obstetrics*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1973.



Debates surrounding the maternal body's relationship to the fetus were of great cultural concern during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. The majority of medical views during Shelley's time posited that women's role in reproduction was entirely passive; they were merely the incubators of male seed and enjoyed no special bond with the developing fetus. Since Aristotle the opinion that the female contributed only matter, whereas the male supplied both form and soul, remained predominantly unchallenged within mainstream science. Erasmus Darwin, an author that Shelley was familiar with, asserts in *Zoonomia* (1794) that "the real power of imagination, in the act of generation, belongs solely to the male" (Rubenstein 180). Since matter was viewed as base when compared to the transcendental spirit, women's role in procreativity was not only seen as passive but also inferior.

Although obstetric theory allotted women a subordinate role in biological reproduction, there was an older folk belief that asserted the power of the mother's imagination over the fetus. Alan Bewell states that this older, contrary view "reasserted the importance of the mother by admitting that the mother's imagination... might intervene" (111) in the reproductive process. The discourse of monstrosity asserted that a pregnant woman's unregulated imagination had the power to mar or deform the developing fetus. Bewell explains that central to this theory was the belief that a "woman's imagination functioned mimetically: an image placed before her eyes and strongly impressed on her imagination would be reproduced on the body of the child" (109). Although this construct of the female imagination was cast in negative terminology, it nonetheless accorded women power and agency.

This theory was perpetuated by the majority of women despite the science that refuted its claims. Bewell contends that the “female willingness to promote this discourse as a trade-off of one form of power for another... [shows] that despite their social confinement, pregnant women did derive from this discourse a certain form of limited power” (115). Although this discourse blamed the birth of monsters on the female imagination, it did so by ironically asserting women’s importance in reproduction and their fundamental connection to their offspring. In 1726, Mary Toft claimed that she delivered sixteen rabbits over the course of a few months. Toft explained the rabbit births by stating that while pregnant she was startled by a rabbit. She later had an uncontrollable desire to eat rabbit that was heightened by a dream about them. Her desire, however, remained unfulfilled. The theory of monstrous births posited that it did not matter whether the desire was gratified or disappointed. The point was that the longing was excessive. Toft managed to fool not only her attendants but also the most acknowledged physicians in London. After the monarch was informed of the controversy Toft confessed to her lie. Philip K. Wilson notes that at “least fifteen pamphlets and songs appeared at the time satirizing what was portrayed as a mass delusion” (64). These satires depicted Toft’s medical supporters as gullible.

The Toft scandal raised a folklore belief into a public, medical debate. The two most predominant figures in this debate were Daniel Turner and James Blondel. Blondel opposed the imaginationist view based on its inconsistency in attributing the same defect to opposing causes. Also, many mothers with deformed children claimed that they had peaceful and comfortable pregnancies. In his *The Strength of Imagination in Pregnant Women Examined* (1727), Blondel asserts that although falls, accidents and irregular diet

can damage a fetus, it is “scandalous [to]... suppose, that those Whom God Almighty has endow’d... [with] an extraordinary Love and Tenderness for the Children... breed Monsters by the Wantonness of their Imagination” (Wilson 65-66). He viewed women, in other words, as incapable of such destructiveness because of their supposed innate predilection towards nurturing.

Blondel was a preformationist who believed in an emboitment theory of generativity. These theories combined proposed that the preformed embryonic entity existed since the beginning of time and development occurred by an increase in its size. Blondel argued that women played no role in conception or fetal development. In earlier times there was a link established between conception and female desire, but it had been eroded away by medical advances (Laqueur 2). In its place scientists such as Blondel argued that women could not control conception, withhold nourishment from a fetus, or select sex or any characteristics of a child. From these assertions he deduced that “it is not within her power to disfigure it either” (Wilson 77). Blondel’s scientific evidence for his view was that the mind and the body were separate, and since the imagination was confined to the mind its passions were incapable of physically affecting the fetus (Wilson 72). He also explicitly states that there is no anatomical relationship between the mother and fetus. He posits that since the woman’s body is self-enclosed before pregnancy, then a vessel or artery cannot simply connect to the embryo at the time of conception. He concludes that the placenta is nowhere attached to the uterus, but is solely of fetal origin (Wilson 79). He also maintains that there is no connection between nervous systems, and therefore no pathways exist for the transportation of maternal passions to the fetus. According to him, the uterus is merely a container in which the developing child takes

“Lodging for a short time” (Wilson 79). In his view, then, pregnant women enjoy no physical or mental bond with their children and play no active role in fetal development.

Although the exposure of the discourse of monstrous births as credulous could be seen as an advance in science, it took away a power traditionally assigned to women. It also eliminated a belief in an essential and biological link pregnant women maintained with their unborn children. There were, however, those who argued in favour of this biological connection. Daniel Turner was a High-Churchman who supported the traditional view of monstrous births in his *An Answer to a Pamphlet on the Powers of Imagination in Pregnant Women* (1729). In this pamphlet he asserts that excessive passions in pregnant women affect the entire body, which includes the developing fetus. Images in the mother’s mind could be imprinted on the fetus via humours and spirits (Wilson 73). He further states that “only the malleable foetus, and not the adult mother, was susceptible to... the imagination” (Wilson 73). His view, contrary to Blondel’s, argues that the mother and fetus do have a biological connection. Turner asserts that blood circulation between the mother and fetus develops in the early stages of pregnancy so that nutrients can be transported to the fetus. However, also inherent in this view is the belief that the maternal body is a threat to the well-being and health of the child. The discourse of monstrous births, then, offered women an ambivalent kind of power. It affirmed their active role in reproductive processes, but at the expense of a conceptualization of the maternal body as something inherently faulty and dangerous.

The debate between Turner and Blondel remained controversial up until the nineteenth-century, with supporters on each side. An excellent example of how these views continued to persist long after science proved them false can be seen in *Aristotle’s*

Master-Piece. This anonymous work was continually adapted from the seventeenth-century. It went through twenty editions in the eighteenth-century and even more in the nineteenth. Four quite distinct versions evolved, although all are marked by their bringing together of folklore and old wives' tales concerning reproduction. One of the dominant themes is the belief in the powers of the mother's imagination to mark or deform the fetus (Porter 11). This work has generally been disparaged by historians for its lack of science, and yet its many editions prove that it was widely read and influential. Although it cannot be known who was its primary readership, it is interesting to note that an early edition advertised itself as being necessary for "midwives, nurses and young married women" (Porter 13). Perhaps, as Bewell contends, women had something to gain in perpetuating the belief in maternal imaginative power.

The belief that a woman possessed the power to imprint upon the fetus whatever was in her imagination was satirized and exploited in popular culture, as evident in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751). Although this belief accorded women a form of power and agency, it was cast in a negative light. As Roy Porter phrases it, the "future of the race seemed to depend on what chanced to be racing through the mind of the weaker sex, whose rationality was doubted at the best of times" (11). This view of the dangers of the female imagination gave men the assumed right to regulate women's minds and bodies. Medical men sought to control the generativity of the womb by insisting on the instability of the maternal body. Julia Epstein asserts that "female interiority represented a potential excess that must be policed" (120). Women's bodies were seen as a hostile and dangerous environment in which the male seed had to

develop, and as sole originators of the fetus, men thought themselves justified in protecting the fetus through control.

The surveillance and discipline of the maternal body was institutionally sanctioned under the assumption that medical professionals alone knew what was best. It is noteworthy that although Blondel and Turner disagreed on many points, they both advised women on how to act during their pregnancies. Wilson calls their advice “practical recommendations” (80). However, such things as telling women what foods and drinks to avoid, which environments to remain in and what moods to be in all signify the eighteenth-century’s greater attempt to control and manage pregnant women. Advice was more and more seen as something only medically trained professionals were authorized to give.

Midwifery conduct books saw a massive increase in publication between 1650-1800. These books were written by both men and women, although the proportion of women authors to men was considerably less. This is because many midwives were of the lower-classes and did not have writing skills. For these women, midwifery was a practice steeped in tradition and practical experience, which was passed down from one generation to the next. The need to produce publications came with the introduction of medical men to the field, who then sought to institutionalize the practice. Women who wanted to remain competitive with men attempted to form their own guild, and gain access to medical schools. They were, however, denied on both accounts. The writings of women primarily deal with the take-over of their field by male midwives. Authors such as Sarah Stone, Mary Stephen and Martha Mears all argue for increased education

of midwives, and a reliance on nature rather than “art.” The last work published by a female midwife was Martha Mears’ *Pupil of Nature* in 1797.

There was, however, a proliferation of works that were much more disciplinary in nature. In *Aristotle’s Master-Piece* there is a series of rules for how women should act during each stage of pregnancy, and Smellie’s *Treatise* contains a chapter entitled “Of the Management of Women.” Other books include Jane Sharpe’s *The Midwives Book*, which is subtitled *Directing Childbearing Women how to behave themselves; In their Conception, Breeding, Bearing, and Nursing of Children*, and John Clarke’s *Practical Essays on the Management of Pregnancy and Labour*. These books established rules of conduct for pregnant women. By not following these rules, authors frequently warned, the expectant mother was taking great liberties with the health of her baby. Bewell writes that where traditionally a mother’s behaviour “was guided by moral, religious, familial, and economic restraints, pregnant women found themselves... the subject of intensive medical scrutiny and advice” (107). The view most frequently put forth in these books was that from the moment of conception women were to remain quiet, peaceful, maintain a regular diet and avoid extremes of any kind. The ideal environment was not public or solitary, but a domestic one that would keep their minds occupied with the appropriate subjects. Medical theories, then, worked in connection with patriarchal ideology to legitimate women’s relegation to the domestic sphere.

These concerns are evident in Shelley’s tale of a monstrous birth. Bewell has effectively shown that Victor Frankenstein does all the things midwifery conduct books warned pregnant women against. He is excessively consumed with his project, has an irregular diet, sleeps little and avoids all contact with other people. In this sense,

“Victor’s monster can be read as the objectification of his own unregulated and contradictory desires” (Bewell 117). Bewell then asserts that Victor’s failed creation can be seen as a projection of Shelley’s own sense of guilt and reproach concerning the death of her first child. Bewell writes, “it would have been difficult for any woman, having faced this painful loss, not to have wondered whether her inability to carry this child for its full term was not caused by the physical, emotional, and financial strains that she had suffered from the moment she first eloped with Shelley” (120). One can add to this the legacy of Shelley’s mother. It was proposed by some that Wollstonecraft’s death in childbirth was a punishment for “having dared too much” (Rubenstein 167). A reviewer of Godwin’s *Memoirs* in the *European Magazine* (1798) unapologetically asserts that Wollstonecraft’s life and death should act “as a warning to those who fancy themselves at liberty to dispense with the laws of propriety and decency” (Durant 341). Both Shelley’s and her mother’s unconventional life-styles attracted a certain amount of social criticism, which would have been hard not to internalize to some degree. The notion of monstrosity, then, has a complex relationship with Shelley’s own anxieties about motherhood.

The creature may be Victor’s scientific blunder, but more fundamentally it is Shelley’s monstrous literary creation. In her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Shelley makes an explicit connection between biological reproduction and literary production. The metaphor of childbirth is employed for the creation of her monstrous text. She writes, “Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener” (8). Rubenstein remarks of this passage that in it Shelley portrays her “imagination as a passive womb, inseminated by those

titans of romantic poetry, Byron and Shelley” (181). This can be further seen in her view of creation. She states that invention “does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials... give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself” (8). This sounds remarkably similar to the Aristotelian view that men contribute the spirit to the fetus, whereas women contribute only the matter. From this Rubenstein concludes that Shelley views her imagination as passive, which reflects conflictual beliefs over the possibility of an active (pro)creative role for women. It is arguable, however, that Shelley asserts a view opposite to this in her quote, “My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie” (9). Her “unbidden” imagination, far from being passive, can be linked to the belief that the unregulated, female imagination led to monstrous births. Shelley’s authorship, then, does become active when she assigns herself the power to decide its final form. Asserting this authority she writes, “I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband” (10). This is perhaps the reason why she affectionately calls the novel her “hideous progeny” (10).

Shelley’s text conveys her conflictual feelings about authorship and motherhood that are bound up into the discourse of monstrosity. In one sense she is asserting the power of the female imagination, but she is also stating that this imagination can only figure itself through the production of a monstrous birth. This ambiguous form of power that she assigns to herself as author is thematically explored in her descriptions of Victor’s lead up to the creation of his own monster. Drawing upon the sciences that sought to eclipse female power, she shows how Victor represents technologies’ ultimate

usurpation of the birth process and its tragic ramifications. But in an ironic twist, she links her own literary production to Victor's monstrous creation. Although this asserts her imaginative authority in the shaping of her own work, it does so in a form that is bound up with the notion of monstrosity. This ambivalent stance reveals a sense of guilt over her unconventional life-style, writing and traveling while pregnant, while simultaneously resisting and negating the belief in the regulation of the maternal body.

The monstrous birth metaphor was also applied to the writings of another woman previously mentioned – Elizabeth Nihell. Nihell had responded to a critique of her *Treatise* by Tobias Smollett in the *Critical Review*. Smollett, in turn, answered her reply by calling for an end to the exchange and stating, “you have delivered yourself of a monstrous birth that fully evinces your dexterity in the obstetric art: may it, however, be the last of our begetting!” (412). Although Smollett sees the exchange as both of their begetting, he attributes its monstrosity to Nihell alone. It seems that Nihell's most scathing criticism is that a man-midwife is “neither physician, surgeon, nor apothecary” (190). This is in fact an accurate statement since at the time there was snobbery within the fields of medicine against accoucheurs. It was viewed as debased because it was manual rather than mental and dealt with the private matters of women. In fact, it was not until the 1858 Medical Registration Act that the old caste system of rank finally gave way. Smollett's defensiveness can be seen in his reassurance that Smellie practiced a “gentleman's method of teaching”(191). Both the examples of Shelley and Nihell demonstrate that women who went “unregulated,” and entered the male domain of science only to critique its ideology, were constructed as mothers of monstrous texts.

This act of resistance to patriarchal authority and control, although cast in the language of monstrosity, can be seen as a form of cultural power available to women.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be viewed in the context of the discourses surrounding the maternal body. In the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries the maternal body came under close medical scrutiny unlike anything in the previous centuries. With the invention of forceps, male-midwives took control over normal labours. Constructing pregnancy and birth as a pathology, they were able to insist on technological intervention. Midwifery conduct books sought to discipline the maternal body, but women countered these attempts at regulation through their own assertion of the maternal imagination's ability to impress itself onto the fetus. Shelley's text is bound up in the notion of monstrous births through her linking of literary production with sexual procreation. What is revealed is a limited form of power in which women assert their biological link to their unborn children, and their ability to affect fetal development. Shelley also critiques the diminishing role of women in the birth process through her characterization of Victor Frankenstein. A scientist who defies all the laws of nature, he propagates in a solitary fashion and then symbolically kills the mother to legitimate his usurpation of female reproduction.

Shelley's text, however, should not be read as an unambiguous critique of the medical establishment's authority over the maternal body. Her own associations with Victor as the producer of monsters, and her conflictual feelings about motherhood also have to be taken into account. The image of the mother represents the proximity of life to death, a proximity that undoubtedly Shelley felt herself as a motherless child. The critique of Victor's usurpation of natural, female reproduction is thus underwritten by an

autobiographical anxiety over the role of motherhood. Shelley's novel, her "hideous progeny," becomes a form of production that she can control. It is not subject to death in the same way that children are. The erasure of the mother in *Frankenstein* is as much due to Victor's willful autonomy as Shelley's repression of the fatal aspects of the maternal body.

THREE

Ann Yearsley: Maternity and the Politics of the Breast

Ann Yearsley is a writer who has always existed on the margins of the literary canon. In her own day, she experienced prejudice due to her gender and lower social class. As a milk-woman turned poet, her social superiors praised her for her “natural” and “rustic” genius. But this praise came at a cost. When Hannah More took Yearsley on as her protégée, it was under the assumption that Yearsley would treat More with unconditional gratitude. More, with the help of Elizabeth Montagu, obtained subscribers for Yearsley’s first volume of poetry *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785). It did exceptionally well, as testified from the £350 it earned from the first edition and the nearly £600 it made from all four editions. This was a considerable amount of money, which can be gauged by the fact that William Blake, another working-class poet, made £5 10s in 1793 with the publication of *Songs of Innocence*. It is estimated that Blake may have realized £600, not counting expenses, through the publication of all the illuminated works over a thirty-eight year period (Viscomi 173-4). Yearsley, however, made this amount in profits in just a few short years. The alliance between Yearsley and More ended when Yearsley sought financial independence. More had put the money from the sales of Yearsley’s *Poems* into a trust fund under her and Montagu’s names, thereby preventing Yearsley’s husband access to the money. Yearsley had signed the deed in haste, and later requested that the deed be modified so that she be made a joint trustee. Although this request does not seem unreasonable, More saw the questioning of her authority as a form of ingratitude.

The seeds of this dispute are evident from early on in the relationship. In 1784, More wrote to Montagu, “I am utterly against taking her out of her station. Stephen [Duck] was an excellent Bard as a Thrasher, but as a Court Poet, and rival to Pope, detestable” (Ferguson 249). In the same year she wrote again to Montagu, condescendingly stating, “All I see of her, raises my opinion of her genius... which you will allow to be extraordinary for a milker of Cows, and feeder of Hogs, who had never seen a Dictionary” (Ferguson 249). Class prejudice is what ultimately doomed this alliance. When Yearsley demanded the right to control her earnings, More wrote another letter to Montagu that is full of her suspicion of the lower classes. She states, “Nothing wou’d appease her fury but having the money to spend, and which she expected in a fit of vulgar resentment, I shou’d give her, but my sense of duty will not allow it... I hear she wears very fine Gauze Bonnets, long lappets, gold Pins etc. Is such a Woman to be trusted with her poor Children’s money?” (Ferguson 251). More not only objects to Yearsley dressing above her station, but also represents her as being unfit to mother because of her presumed vanity and desire for money. Class prejudice and the rhetoric of maternity collided in an attempt to publicly defame Yearsley when More engaged in a letter-writing campaign against her in the summer and fall of 1785. In these letters More described Yearsley as an intemperate ingrate, who was likely to squander the money that should be saved for her children’s future (Feldman 833).

More’s account of the dispute carried so much influence, that Yearsley felt compelled to publish a prefatory narrative that countered More’s version of the dispute in the fourth edition of her *Poems*. She published this narrative, along with the deed to the trust arrangement as an appendix, to confirm her side of the story. Yearsley’s lack of

faith in her side being fairly represented seems to have been justified. After her death, she has been primarily known for her falling out with her more famous patron. Moira Ferguson notes that “the majority of More’s biographers would portray... [Yearsley] as a course, selfish ingrate” (252). Despite Yearsley’s literary achievements, until very recently she has been viewed as a historical curiosity and not worthy of scholarly attention. Yearsley was aware that More held considerable influence, but this did not prevent her from defending her personal integrity. When More withdrew her support, Yearsley received help from Eliza Dawson who, through the permission of her father, offered to collect subscribers for her second volume of poetry. Through Dawson’s unintrusive financial support, and the assistance of the highly respected publishing firm G.G.J. & J. Robinson, Yearsley was able to achieve a creative and financial independence remarkable for someone of her class.

Yearsley’s second volume *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787), contains a poem dedicated to her mother, Ann Cromartie, entitled “On the Remembrance of a Mother.” Her mother first got Yearsley interested in literature by borrowing books from the people she delivered milk to. They would also wander through the Clifton churchyard, reading verses together and musing on the deceased (Ferguson 249). Yearsley was educated as an outsider, learning mythology by peering into shop windows and looking at art prints (Cole and Swartz 149). It was her mother who first instructed her and empowered her to rise above her station in life.

Ann Cromartie died tragically in the harsh winter of 1783-4, when the family was left without sufficient food or heat, had no furniture, and no income. Yearsley’s husband was a failed agricultural labourer, and the landlord had taken everything they owned

(Ferguson 248). Mrs. Cromartie lived long enough to see the family rescued through the charity of a stranger, Richard Vaughn, who found the family in desperate conditions and immediately sent over some provisions. It was, however, too late for Mrs. Cromartie who died shortly after. Yearsley alludes to this tragic event in her poem, writing, "I with horror saw/ The grave that op'd beneath" (18-9). The poem is suffused with a melancholy tone, lamenting the tragic and avoidable death of her mother. There is, however, a more positive note. Beneath the sadness is the realization that her mother is her source of strength. Near the beginning of the poem Yearsley asks her mother to still "be with me, kind instructive shade, And sooth the mis'ries of successive hours" (5-6). Yearsley progresses through the rest of the poem to come to an acceptance of her mother's death.

She praises her mother for her kindness, and strength of character that was able to sustain them both through hardships. Yearsley writes,

How oft, with thee, when life's keen tempest howl'd
Around our heads, did I contented sit,
Drinking the wiser accents of thy tongue,
Listless of threat'ning ill! My tender eye
Was fix'd on thine, inquisitively sad,
Whilst thine was dim with sorrow; yet thy soul
Betray'd no innate weakness (50-6).

Their mutual suffering created a bond that was able to sustain them both. Under her mother's wing, Yearsley found "shelter from inclement skies" (61). Now that her mother has died she asks, "Now who shall shield me"? (62). Her answer is to draw on her own strength, a strength that her mother has given to her. She writes, "Ah, unavailing question! Fancy paints/ A Mother's frown on her denying brow,/ That bids me rest on virtues all my own"(65-7). No longer can she be sheltered under her mother's protective

wing, but must fight on her own behalf. This poem is a beautiful elegy on her mother's death, that both celebrates the mother/ daughter bond while affirming her own strength as an individual.

Ferguson writes that having watched her mother die of starvation, "Yearsley was intimate with severe psychological and physical suffering. Penury had previously been a condition to combat, but her mother's death fostered an angry strength and the knowledge that resistance was literally a life-and-death affair" (247). This resistance to class prejudice and social injustice is a recurring theme in Yearsley's works. This is evident in Yearsley's vigorous attack on the late Mayor of Bristol, Levi Eames. His social status did not intimidate her, or prevent her from publicly denouncing him. The advertisement to the *Stanzas of Woe* (1790) states that her two sons were caught playing in Eames' fields by his footman who then beat them with a horsewhip. Yearsley was advised by a lawyer not to press charges because class difference would work against her. A few days later, the same footman again attacked one of her sons. Yearsley pressed charges this time, but her lawyer "justly supposing her purse not to be *quite* so heavy as Mr. Eames's, advised her to drop the prosecution" (ii). A year later, Yearsley was sitting by her front door when she saw a man chasing two unknown children from Eames' fields. The children escaped, and the man supposing them to be hers "treated her in a vulgar opprobrious manner" (ii). She found out that this man was also Eames' servant. The shock and verbal abuse she endured caused her to miscarry that night.

With great irony she dedicates *Stanzas of Woe* to Levi Eames, calling herself and her children his humble servants. She adds, however, that she is not convinced that he follows the rule, "What we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord" since this also includes

“even an Horsewhip!” (iii). The poem begins with her “shatter’d lyre”, for sorrow has checked “the ardent fire,/ That once was wont to bear my soul on high”(9-12). She asks Eames to remember the playful innocence of his youth, and then demands to know how he can justify his treatment of her children. She warns him that her children’s “feeble cries shall for my vengeance call,/ And fill my soul with wild, eternal rage” (31-2). She compares herself to “the cheated tygress of the plains,/ Robb’d of her young she’d scare thy coward soul;/ Maternal agony high in her veins!/ What pow’r of thine would her fierce wrath controul?”(33-6). She compares her desire for revenge to the fierce love an animal has for its young. Maternal love here becomes ruthless, savage and animalistic. Yearsley would have been fully aware of the stereotyping of the rural classes as animals or sub-human. During their dispute More called Yearsley a “savage,” at which Yearsley responded that More would never have had “the temerity to do it, had not I given myself that name!” (Ferguson 252). Typically, the lower classes were compared to beasts of burden. Yearsley turns this metaphor onto herself, but does so in such a way as to destabilize reader expectations. The unjust treatment of her children has made her into a sublime, predatory beast. If she is the savage, she ironically asks Eames, “Art thou the follower of Jesus?” (61). She answers her own question with the assertion that “*From true Religion tortures never flow*” (63).

Conscious of class prejudice, she tells the reader that she was denied “*all hope of public right*” (51). Eames was protected from legal punishment through his social status. Yearsley was aware that the only punishment she could inflict upon him would be an attack on his reputation. This poem is not only a way to express her sorrow over her “infant slain” (15), but also is an attempt to sway public opinion against him by making

an appeal to her maternal affections. With powerful rhetoric, she writes, “Insolent Tyrant! Humble as we are,/ Our minds are rich with honest truth as thine;/ Bring on thy sons, their value we’ll compare,/ Then – lay thy infant in the grave with mine” (37-40). Through an emphasis on the physicality of the infant’s corpse, Yearsley does not allow the reader to view the child merely as an abstraction. The injustice of its death seems intolerable because it is given an identity and a name. Yearsley states that its name was to be “Eliza” (84). She puts Eliza’s name next to the names of her mother and brother, making a list of all those she has loved and lost. At the end of the poem, the only consolation she has is that the infant’s soul is on its way up to heaven.

Throughout her works, Yearsley uses the maternal subject position in her attacks against social injustice. This strategy allowed her a considerable amount of authority. By the middle of the eighteenth-century motherhood had become a cultural focus to an extent never reached in previous centuries. There was a new sentimentality around maternity, which sought to construct it as noble, virtuous and self-sacrificial. The reason for this cultural shift of attitudes can be located in the nation’s need for more citizens. Ruth Perry writes that Britain simply needed more people “to keep up with the commercial and military interests of the state” (206). The maternal body became a national resource, and the breast became a site of cultural concern. It is therefore significant that Yearsley creates for herself a poetic persona called “Lactilla.” This name belongs to the pastoral tradition, which serves to figure Yearsley within her texts as a plebeian writer and rustic muse. Horace Walpole warned More that Yearsley “must remember that she is Lactilla, not a Pastora, and is to tend real cows, not Arcadian sheep (Feldman 832). Lactilla, then, did designate the lower social class of a milkwoman, but it

could also highlight the fact that Yearsley was a nursing mother. As Donna Landry notes, “Lactilla” could symbolize a “metonymic association with bountiful lactation” (26).

Language is a highly political medium, growing out of particular historical contexts and conflicts. It should then be of no surprise that the Swedish physician and botanist Carolus Linnaeus introduced the word “Mammalia” into zoological nomenclature in his 1758 treatise *Systema Naturae*. Mammals, which literally means “of the breast,” includes those animals previously called quadrupeds. Science historian Londa Schiebinger calls attention to the gender politics implicit in Linnaeus’ choice of terms. The possession of a mammary gland is only one of six unique characteristics of mammals. Schiebinger notes that other common terms used by naturalists were *Pilosa* (hair), *Aurecaviga* (hollow-eared), and *Tetracoilia* (four-chambered heart). Mammal, however, was the term that stuck. This is despite the fact that some mammals, such as stallions, do not even have teats. Schiebinger questions Linnaeus’ choice since the “presence of milk-producing mammae is, after all, but one characteristic of mammals... Furthermore, the mammae are ‘functional’ in only half of this group of animals” (41). Clearly, Linnaeus’ nomenclature was informed by and helped legitimate his culture’s view that women should suckle their own children.

Linnaeus uses the traditional image of Diana of the Ephesians, a symbol of fertility, as the frontispiece to his *Fauna Svecica* (1746). In this print, Diana is bound to the earth with an immobile lower half. Reinforcing her connection to nature and fecundity, the exposed part of her body displays her many breasts [fig 3.1]. It is notable



3.1 Frontispiece to Carolus Linnaeus' *Fauna Svecica*, 1746. The multi-breasted figure of Diana represents nature's bounty. Reprinted from Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.

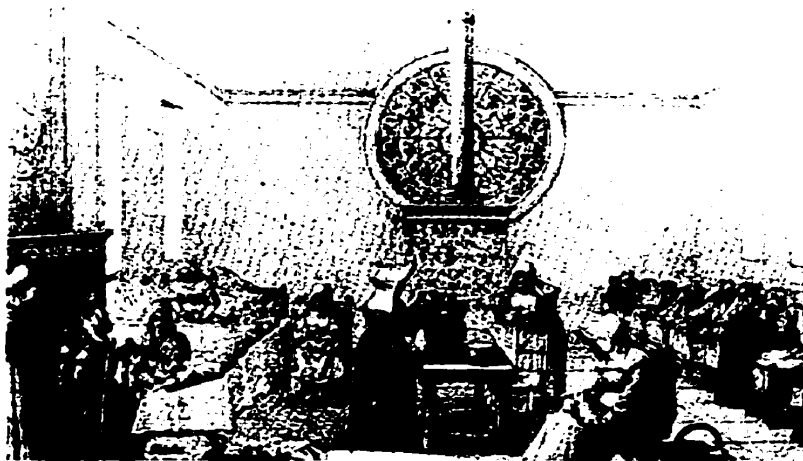
that Erasmus Darwin also portrays nature as the multi-breasted Diana in the frontispiece to his *The Temple of Nature* (1803). As the mother and nurse to all living things, Diana's breasts symbolize generation, regeneration and renewal. Woman becomes the embodiment of the natural world. In the *Fauna Svecica*, Linnaeus defends his grouping of humans together with other quadrupeds. Humans are viewed as just another animal, which is a belief he later relies on when he assures women that it is natural for all female mammals to suckle their young. In his anti-wetnursing pamphlet, *Step Nurse* (1752), Linnaeus contrasts the "barbarity of women who deprived their children of mother's milk with the gentle care of great beasts" (Schiebinger 67).

As stated in the previous chapter, the eighteenth-century saw an unprecedented publication of midwifery conduct books, but this century also produced many medical treatises directed to the nursing and management of infants. Fears about Europe's declining population stimulated a number of health campaigns directed towards infant care. Linnaeus' *Step Nurse*, was only one of several that espoused the dangers of wet-nursing. Like those who came after him, Linnaeus argued that wet-nursing went against the dictates of nature, and could prove fatal to both child and mother. He emphasized that women who "forced back" their milk were more likely to suffer from milk fever (Schiebinger 67). Wet-nursing was in the early eighteenth-century an established practice. In the seventeenth-century it was considered a sign of status, since only the wealthy could afford to send their children to live at a wet-nurse's residence. The practice, however, soon became fashionable and moved down the social ladder. A rural nurse was affordable to the aspiring middle-classes. There seems to have been no shortage of wet-nurses, since it was one of the few occupations where a labouring-woman

could earn the same amount as her husband if she nursed more than one child. It is estimated that in 1780 only 10% of Parisian babies were nursed at home (Yalom 106). What is statistically striking is that by 1801 half of all Parisian babies and two-thirds of English babies were nursed at home by their own mothers.

The dramatic decrease in wet-nursing practices can be attributed to a sudden change in public opinion. Although many factors affected high infant mortality, such as dry-feeding and poor conditions in foundling hospitals [fig 3.2], the main cause of mortality was attributed to country wet-nurses. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others, claimed that breast-feeding was the “natural” duty of the mother which was, in turn, subsumed under her higher duty towards the state. If women breast-fed their own babies, it was believed that the high infant mortality rate would lower, since babies would not be sent to live in the households of lower-class nurses where they could be contaminated with supposedly impure or “polluted” milk. Statistics show that infant mortality did decrease when maternal breast-feeding increased, which gave credence to theorists. Valerie A. Fildes notes that overall infant mortality (0-12 months) in England was at 181% in the 1730s. This figure lowered to 150% in 1840. More specifically, infant mortality (0-12 months) within the British aristocracy went from 166% in 1749 to 85% in 1799.

Country wet-nurses made an easy scapegoat for infant mortality because of their lower social class. Nurses were accused of carelessness, ignorance and self-interest (Fildes 199). Although this may have been the case in some circumstances, infant deaths were more likely caused by the infant’s lack of colostrum. It is unlikely that a newborn



3.2 A suckling ward in a Paris foundling hospital. The overcrowding of wards meant that an epidemic could quickly spread. Reprinted from Valerie A. Fildes' *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986.



3.3 Greuze's *Le départ de la nourrice*, 1780. The mother says goodbye to her child so that the nurse can return home to the country. Changes in the environment and long journeys proved extremely dangerous for newborns. Reprinted from the same text as above.

would have been put to the maternal breast before being shipped to a wet-nurse, and wet-nurses were not hired immediately following their own delivery, which meant that infants would not receive any of the protective and nutritional benefits of colostrum (Fildes 199). Antibodies in breast-milk decrease in strength the longer after parturition. Children who had to travel from their homes to a wet-nurse's home were especially vulnerable to diseases. The infant would not have received the immunoglobulins to protect it from the pathogens it might encounter during its journey [fig 3.3]. Although eighteenth-century doctors did not have this knowledge, they did have statistics that proved that there was a higher death rate in infants sent to country wet-nurses than those maternally breast-fed. Wet-nursing thus became socially unacceptable because the risks to the baby's health became more widely known.

High infant mortality quickly became a concern of the state. With economic expansion and greater military demands, there was a need for more citizens. A new sentimental rhetoric developed that attempted to infuse the institution of motherhood with the notion of civic duty. Rousseau, in *Emile* (1762), wrote that "when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then [there] will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state" (13). Maternity is idealized as the source of social regeneration. Rousseau's *Emile* was very influential, becoming a bestseller over night in France. Within a year, two translations appeared in England. In *Emile*, Rousseau argues that nature has been perverted by society. For this reason he opposes the slavish dependence on custom. To educate children properly, asserts Rousseau, is to let children follow the dictates of nature [fig 3.4]. These include



3.4 Auguste Claude Le Grand's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou L'Homme de la Nature*, ca. 1785. The mother's connections to nature are emphasized by the rural setting and the ewe that suckles its lamb. Preprinted from Marilyn Yalom's *A History of the Breast*. New York: Ballantine, 1997.

bodily freedom, development of sensory experience, and a focus on observation and experience. Submission to the natural order becomes the moral and national aims of education. Rousseau's politicizing of the domestic realm is quite progressive, but his appeal to "nature" seeks to legitimate women's relegation to the domestic sphere.

According to Rousseau, all the evils of society reach back to the denial of the maternal breast. He writes, "Every evil follows in the train of this first sin; the whole moral order is disturbed, nature is quenched in every breast, the home becomes gloomy, the spectacle of a young family no longer stirs the husband's love" (13). By being slaves to fashion, mothers break the primary emotional tie with their children. Women who do not nurse "have ceased to be mothers" (14), and "turn to the injury of the race... [which] with other causes of depopulation, forbodes the coming fate of Europe" (12). Rousseau uses the concept of the natural to liberate children from parental tyranny, asserting that we are all born free, and yet his view keeps women fettered to the domestic realm through biological determinism.

In Yearsley's poem "To Mira, On the Care of Her Infant" (RL 1796), the speaker promotes Rousseauian ideals of childcare. These include loose clothing rather than tight swaddling, maternal breast-feeding rather than the use of a wet-nurse, affection rather than harsh discipline, liberty rather than restraint, and the pursuit of sensory experience within nature. Yearsley writes, "gently nurse thy beauteous boy - / Lest custom gentle Nature's pow'r destroy" (31-2). Yearsley, a working-class woman, significantly chooses for a negative role model the example of a rich woman whose baby "starved in robes of lace" (65) because she was "Too proud to nurse" (67). Yearsley associates the practice of hiring a wet-nurse with wealthy decadence. This is very similar to the views put forward

by William Cadogan in his *An Essay upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, From Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (1748). This influential text went through at least eleven editions in French and English from the time of its first publication in 1748 until 1792 (Fildes 447). In the essay, Cadogan writes about an heir to a rich family who “lies languishing under a Load of Finery, that overpowers his Limbs, abhorring and rejecting the Dainties he is cramm’d with, till he dies a Victim” (7) because of the vanity of his mother. He further urges every woman to “prevail upon herself to give up a little of the Beauty of her Breast to feed her Offspring” (24).

Cadogan continues that medical men like himself must educate women as to their maternal duty. We have previously seen that there was a growing medicalization and regulation of the maternal body during this century. The previous chapter argued that the medical establishment represented women as natural nurturers, but incapable of knowing how to deal with the changes in their bodies. Expectant mothers were viewed as “unqualified” in such matters, and were expected to take the advice of medical experts over their own wishes. Similarly, Cadogan asserts that the nursing of children must be controlled by men because “this Business has been too long fatally left to the Management of Women who cannot be supposed to have proper Knowledge to fit them for this Task” (3). He even suggests that fathers supervise and direct the nursing mother. He recommends it “to every Father to have his Child nursed under his own Eye, to make use of his own Reason and Sense in superintending and directing the Management of it” (24).

Yearsley’s contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), also promotes the idea of a father watching his wife nurse, but for very

different reasons. She writes, “Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel... delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother”(212-3). Wollstonecraft sought to bring the male into the dyadic relationship not to assert his authority but to establish an affection between husband and wife. She criticized men for being “unwilling to place women in situations proper to enable them to acquire sufficient understanding to know how even to nurse their babes”(248). She is here referring to the fact that some husbands insisted on hiring a wet-nurse, because it was believed that women should not engage in sexual activity and nurse at the same time. Wollstonecraft claimed that maternal breast-feeding should be done because it is a natural capacity of the female body. For all her differences with Rousseau, she similarly viewed nursing as a manifestation of civic duty. For Rousseau, however, women’s ability to nurse meant that they were unqualified to participate in the public realm. This was not the case for Wollstonecraft, who asserted that only women who were involved in public life could become affectionate and reasonable mothers. Corinne Field argues that for Wollstonecraft, “nature intended women to embody both reason and eros. She used the breast, with its dual capacity to give sexual pleasure and nurse infants, as evidence” (28).

Yearsley’s poem also positions itself against the theories of paternal supervision evident in Cadogan. She writes, “Permit me, pensive friend, who long have known/ A mother’s duty.../ Teach thee to gently nurse thy beauteous boy” (29-31). The speaker does not submit to a “higher” medical authority, but insists on her own knowing through experience. She also asks her friend for permission to give advice, setting the situation up as an exchange between women who are equals. She then goes on to describe nursing

as a personal inter-change between mother and child that gives pleasure to both. Sally Shuttleworth asserts that breast-feeding was not threatening if “it functioned as a conscious social duty, prescribed and regulated from without, and not a pleasurable physical, solipsistic bonding of mother and child” (43). Yearsley writes that although nursing is a “mother’s duty,” it also signifies “pleasing cares” (30). In another instance she asserts that through breast-feeding “soft maternal pleasure shine;/ Pleasure that virtuous mothers highly taste” (72-3). In an inversion of maternal/ child relations, it is the mother who “tastes.” In the maternal dyad, mother and child exist as one, each giving and receiving through reciprocal affection and sympathy. Yearsley’s emphasis on reciprocal pleasure undercuts the focus on duty found in the texts of Rousseau and Cadogan. Yearsley uses her maternal subject position to evoke sentimentality around breast-feeding, but then uses this position to resist patriarchal control over female bodies and to celebrate the pleasurable bonding between mother and child.

Through her maternal subject position Yearsley creates a cultural space in which women set war and violence in opposition to maternal feelings. Although this opposition upholds traditional binaries which associate women with domestic affections and men with the public sphere, the maternal subject position gave Yearsley an assumed moral authority to comment on public matters that threatened to destroy domestic harmony. In “To Mira,” Yearsley depicts war as a chaos that “would shake the world” (5), and alludes to the volatile period of the French Revolution in the lines, “Whilst here a monarch, there a subject dies;/ Equally dear to him who rules the skies”(3-4). She contends that a woman could never kill a person who “breathes affection whilst the heart is warm” (16). Yearsley writes, “I am no Amazon.../.../ Nay, if, like hers, my heart were iron-bound,/

My warmth would melt the fetters to the ground”(19-22). She is asserting that women’s warmth, that is her ability to love makes her incapable of violence.

Yearsley is directly stating her opposition to the involvement of French women in the revolution. In the early years of the revolution there were reports of women dressing like Amazons to show their support of the revolution. There were also descriptions of women in male costume, carrying pistols, or having hunting knives and swords hanging from their skirts (Landes 110-1). Yearsley distances herself from female militancy, viewing it as at odds with domestic nurturance, but also as something distinctly French. The view of French women’s involvement in the revolution was propagandized by conservative critics as a “monstrous” spectacle. Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), describes the mob that has taken over the legislative body as consisting of “ferocious men, and of women lost to shame, who, according to their insolent fancies, direct, control, applaud, explode them, and sometimes mix and take their seats amongst them, domineering over them with a strange mixture of servile petulance and proud, presumptuous authority” (79). He is quite explicit about the consequences to public order if women are not confined to the domestic sphere. No longer obedient to the authority of the father, women become unnatural creatures. By defying the laws of “natural” female propriety, these women have become spectacles of monstrosity. Burke describes the scene in which the captured royals are led down the streets of Paris “amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell in the abused shape of the vilest of women” (82).

In contrast to the monstrous spectacle of revolutionary women, Burke sets up the French Queen Marie Antoinette as the epitome of feminine virtues. He depicts her as a passive victim in an attempt to evoke male pity. He writes:

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins... rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a King and husband (82).

It seems appropriate for the Queen to rush to the feet of her husband at her most vulnerable. Although there are no records that the Queen was “almost naked,” Burke uses this description to suggest a violent rape. The ruffians with their piercing bayonets attack the Queen on her bed. This imagery is evocative of feminine vulnerability and phallic penetration. This imagery is picked up in D. Pellegrini’s painting *The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison* (1795). It depicts the Queen in brilliant white nightgown being led away by men who are, by contrast, in almost total darkness. One of the men urges her forward by threatening her with a sword close to her back [fig 3.5]. The focus for both Burke and Pellegrini is on the Queen’s noble character, and her vulnerability when confronted with male aggression.

Linda M. G. Zerilli asserts that Burke’s rhetorical strategy is to appropriate the language of “‘feminine sensibility’ in which masculine displays of emotion are framed by a larger rhetoric of chivalry” (64). The notion of chivalry itself presumes that women are weak and in need of male protection. This is evident when Burke writes, “little did I dream the I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men... I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult” (86). Through his descriptions of monstrous,



3.5 D. Pellegrini's *The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison*, 1795. Note that the Queen is being threatened with a phallic-like sword. Her virtue and innocence is heightened by the brightness of her white dress. Preprinted from David Bindman's *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution*. London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1989.

revolutionary women and feminine vulnerability, Burke sets up an opposition between those women who should be denied citizenship and those who are worthy of male protection.

Burke, among others, was horrified at the idea that women could take to the streets, as they did on October fifth when they marched on Versailles. There were approximately six thousand women there, all of whom demanded to have bread for their families. Although women started out as being politically involved in the revolution, by the 1790s they were being forced out of the public sphere. A backlash occurred against women's political involvement. By 1793 all women's political organizations were outlawed in France, its most notorious being the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. In October of that same year, Olympe de Gouges and Mme Roland were publicly executed for their militant politics (Landes 94). Pierre Chaumette, president of the Paris Commune, stated that Olympe de Gouges was "impudent" for her involvement in women's societies, and it was because she "abandoned the cares of her household... [that her] head fell beneath the avenging knife of the laws" (Landes 145). The New Republic was attempting to ensure that women remained within the home, and fulfilled their civic duty by becoming domesticated mothers.

In France the promotion of maternal breast-feeding fit into the ideology of separate spheres by ensuring that women would remain within the domestic realm and refrain from public, disorderly conduct. Mandatory maternal nursing became a form of social control. The breast was a symbol for the ideals of the revolution, such as "liberty, fraternity, equality, patriotism, courage, justice, generosity, and abundance" (Yalom 120). In an engraving entitled "La France Républicaine" (1790), the French Republic is

depicted as a woman with abundant breasts. Positioned between her breasts is a carpenter's plane, signifying their symmetry, which demonstrates that all citizens have access to equal amounts of liberty [fig 3.6]. Women's actual involvement in the New Republic, however, was meant to remain a purely symbolic one.

When republican women began wearing *bonnets rouges*, which represented their promotion of the revolution, they were vehemently criticized. Mary Jacobus writes that "the liberty cap became sexually as well as politically transgressive when it moved from the head of 'Marianna,' the popular embodiment of Liberty, to the heads of actual militant women in the streets" (218). After a meeting in which women were "disorderly," Chaumette rhetorically inquired, "Since when is it permitted to give up one's sex? ... Is it to men that nature confided domestic cares? Has she given us breasts to breast-feed our children?" (Jacobus 219). Chaumette returns to the notion of what is "natural" for the sexes to support his claims for separate spheres and woman's return to her maternal duties. It is not surprising that Chaumette would rest his case on the supposed naturalness of maternal duty. The image of the charitable, republican mother, was one in which her ample breasts signified liberty to which all citizens were entitled [fig 3.7]. Marilyn Yalom states that paradoxically, the iconic representations of maternal nursing "drew women into the picture at the very moment they were being written out of public life. The new laws that granted civil rights to religious minorities and even to former slaves did not extend to women" (117-20). The republican mother was the symbol of liberty and not its recipient. Her own rights were to be subsumed under the rubric of the collective good for the state.



3.6 Clément, after Boizot, *La France Républicaine*, Ca. 1790. The maternal breast provided the Revolution with one of its most powerful images of the New Republic. Reprinted from Mary Jacobus' "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution." *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 207-30.



3.7 Charles Cochin and Hubert-Francois Gravelot's *Charité*, 1791. The nursing mother is a traditional symbol of charity. Reprinted from the same text as above.

Women's involvement in politics at the beginning of the revolution gave way to a conservative backlash, which sought to restrict them to the domestic sphere. Mandatory breast-feeding became an ideological tool used to confine women to their traditional roles of mother and nurturer. In 1793, the French government decreed that if a mother did not nurse her own child she and the child would be ineligible for state support. A separate provision added that if an unmarried mother nurses her own child and is in need of economic help, she would be able to claim it (Yalom 115). The question that remains to be asked is that if mandatory, maternal breast-feeding was a political strategy which sought to confine women, why did so many women not only practice but advocate it themselves? Rousseau had won over thousands of women to give up the fashionable practice of hiring a wet-nurse, despite the fact that he proposed that women be relegated to the domestic sphere. *Emile* is fundamentally sexist, asserting that women's roles in life were to please men and nurture children. And yet, many women subscribed to his views concerning maternal nursing. It is arguable that he did this by dignifying breast-feeding. Nursing was no longer a solely private matter, but had become a symbolic manifestation of civic duty.

In France, maternal nursing was viewed as a political choice, a choice that allied women with republican virtues. In 1794 the Festival of the Supreme Being was held, which featured a parade of pregnant and nursing women (Schiebinger 71). Yalom writes that on the whole, 'the nation's overt concern with healthy children allowed numerous concessions to pregnant women and nursing mothers alike. When women looked back on the revolution, they did not consider their breast-feeding stories trivial or irrelevant, since nursing had been raised to a quasi-mythological level' (116). Barbara Gelpi has

shown that women's acceptance of their roles as patriotic nurturers extended into the realm of fashion. For a brief period at the end of the century, dresses were designed to expose the shape of the breast and even the nipple, thereby highlighting women's maternal function (Gelpi 127). Corsets were discarded and dress material became light and almost transparent [fig 3.8]. This "new fashion was as much cultivated by women as [it was] imposed upon them" (Schiebinger 64). Women flaunted their breasts as symbols of their newfound patriotic power, albeit this power was limited to the domestic realm. The breast as a representation of both domestic virtues and political liberty offered women a way to bridge the gap between the private and public spheres. Republican motherhood, although limited by its dependence on claims of "naturalness," did give women a chance to exhibit their patriotic fervor within social bounds.

For those women across the Channel, the politics of the breast also offered women a limited kind of power. The majority of women had submitted to a contractual form of power that accorded them with moral superiority as long as they remained within their traditional roles. Historian Linda Colley asserts that British women who were heavily engaged in political activity were of the minority. "Most women continued to acquiesce in the rightness of separate spheres in the sense that they accepted home and children, together with a measure of subordination to fathers and even more to husbands, were their primary duties, though not their only duties" (Colley 262). These women would have feared the social stigmatism of being labeled an "amazon," as did Yearsley. The promotion of maternal nursing, however, offered women an alternative that was socially acceptable while widening their measure of influence. It did this by politicizing maternal breast-feeding and constructing it as one's patriotic duty. Yearsley evokes this



3.8 Marguerite Gérard's *Les Premiers Pas ou la Mère Nourrice*, ca. 1800. Women's clothing became lighter and more transparent to accentuate the breast. The maternal breast became an erotic symbol. Reprinted from Marilyn Yalom's *A History of the Breast*. New York: Ballantine, 1997.

maternal authority to legitimate her critique of militarism, that is her entry into the public realm of politics, but then subtlety underscores this notion of “duty” by stressing the pleasurable bonding between mother and child.

In “To Mira” Yearsley opposes military destruction and violence on the grounds that it is against her maternal nature. Mothers who “to softer joys retire!/ Spite of those wars... will mild pleasure know” (10-1). During the child’s early years with the mother, a pleasurable bonding occurs between the two that underscores the authority of the father. This dyadic relationship occurs before the acquisition of language and the onset of the oedipal crisis. The child still with “useless tongue” (142) takes gentle breaths that “inspire/ Joy, pleasure, sympathy, new-born desire” (154). Breast-feeding becomes a form of *jouissance*, a mysterious pleasure that dissolves the boundaries between self and other. It also destroys the notion that women are mere compliments to phallic sexuality. The dyadic relationship has traditionally been presented from the perspective of the child, as in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. Yearsley, however, discusses it from the point of view of the mother. In psychoanalytic theory the maternal is positioned outside the regulation of phallic economy, and as such it threatens to disrupt patriarchal organizations of language and culture (Elliott 135). *Jouissance* is the key to this subversion. Yearsley writes of a “Pleasure, that, long as woman lives, shall flow!” (12). This pleasure, which is connected to the maternal body, remains excluded from symbolization and thus represents a potential threat to the dominant male order. Breast-feeding, then, is a source of pleasure and a fundamentally political act. It should be noted that although Cadogan also asserts that women can derive “much Pleasure” from nursing, the liberatory aspects of woman’s pleasure is eliminated by his insistence that men supervise breast-feeding so it does not

become “one of the Mysteries of the *Bona Dea*, from which the Men are to be excluded” (24).

Yearsley also asserts the radical belief that mothers can affect social change through their control of education. As Landry notes, “The poet addresses Mira in a context of continuing exchanges about political events, so that the care of infants is presented not as an isolated, all-absorbing activity, but as integral to a complex scene of social being informed by public activity and capable of participation in it” (261).

Yearsley writes that the care of children occurs “whilst we read, reflect, by turns converse,/ Comment on wars in prose or mimic verse” (27-8). She politicizes the domestic sphere of maternal care by demonstrating its context within the larger picture of public activities. Although Yearsley states that after the stage of infancy the child will be given over to “ancient fathers” (183), within that first stage of a child’s education a mother can “plant thyself true virtue in his mind” (184). Although “ancient fathers” signify the inevitability that children will be brought into the patriarchal system, in the early stages of a child’s education mothers have the opportunity to mold their children into the individuals they think proper. Yearsley writes, “example has its kind,/ Pouring its magic on the docile mind./ Hence nobler spirits shall their likeness breed,/ And one great virtue take the mental lead”(175-8).

Childrearing is viewed as a fundamentally political act. Yearsley contends that a progressive and nurturing childhood will create an enlightened, affectionate individual who will, in turn, become “a citizen of a new affective and emancipatory polity” (Landry 264). This sounds strikingly similar to the ideals of the New French Republic. As mothers to the nation, women were to breast-feed their own children and ensure that they

became effective citizens. The maternal breast offered milk as a symbol of liberty that all citizens could equally drink from. And yet, Yearsley's politicizing of the breast was done in an attempt to dissociate herself from the escalating violence of the revolution. The speaker advises Mira to "Nurse him thyself, for thou canst make him mild" (160).

Yearsley associates maternal breastfeeding with pacifism in the child. She endows the maternal breast with the power to counter aggressive behaviour. The bonding it produces between mother and child will create a gentleness that will last into adulthood. Yearsley relied on the current discourses surrounding the maternal body to assert a mother's power in shaping her child's psyche and future behaviour, but appropriated these discourses as a way to advocate her own critique of militarism.

By appealing to the feminine sphere of maternal affections, Yearsley was able to legitimize her critique. Colley states that the "belief in a distinctive female sphere could... paradoxically, legitimize women's intervention in affairs hitherto regarded as the preserve of men" (273). The maternal subject position did offer women forms of limited power which they could appropriate. Of course, these forms of power were not unproblematic. By praising the nurturing and maternal side of women the traditional male/ female binary was upheld. A privileged femininity in a patriarchal society is all the more dangerous because it idealizes an abstract form of femininity while oppressing real women. But for many women it was all they had to work with. It is arguable that while a celebration of femininity based on the body upholds traditional dichotomies, it also allowed women the opportunity to negotiate their power. If a woman was to directly negate a feminine norm, she would inadvertently validate that norm by embodying the abnormal. Although a traditional role such as mothering supported patriarchy, it also

offered women a powerful subject position. Women could exploit their feminine identities by asserting that their maternal virtues gave them the moral superiority to discuss certain social and political matters. As constrained subjects, women had to resist oppression within the boundaries given to them. Michel Foucault, in “Power and Sex: An Interview with Michel Foucault” (1977), contends that at certain stages of struggle it is necessary for oppressed groups to fight based on the identity which they have been given. Women, then, were able to claim power by subscribing to a conventionally feminine subject position.

The ideology of separate spheres did restrict women but, as Colley notes, feminist historians see it as unambiguously restrictive (262). This was not the case, since the doctrine of separate spheres was contractual. Colley explains that women “refrained, at least in theory, from invading the public sphere, the realm of action, on the understanding that their moral influence would be respected and recognized. They accepted a vulnerable position in life, on the condition that men would maintain and respect them” (263). The French Revolution was seen as a threat to the security of the family unit. The risk of French invasion and the state’s appropriation of men for military tasks threatened the domestic realm – women’s source of cultural power. The British public, which insisted on female vulnerability and male chivalry was horrified by tales about the guillotine’s female victims, the most famous being the French Queen. Colley asserts that Marie Antoinette’s imprisonment, trial and execution were felt in Britain to be more shocking and atrocious than the King’s murder. Colley writes, “Massively and gruesomely publicized in British conservative propaganda, the fate of Marie-Antoinette and her family seems genuinely to have appalled many women, encouraging them to see

this war in France as a cause in which their own welfare and status were peculiarly involved” (256).

In Yearsley’s “An Elegy on Marie Antoinette” (1793), she laments the destruction of feminine virtue in a way similar to Burke. As a devoted wife and loving mother, Marie Antoinette’s death is viewed as a domestic tragedy. Landry states that it is “not Marie Antoinette’s royal status but her vulnerable femininity that Yearsley wishes to champion” (169). Yearsley writes, “Much injur’d Beauty.../ (The motley-Million poisons more than thine,)/ Yet Truth shall burst! in awful Glory flame,/ And all shall vanish, but her spotless Line”(37-40). Marie Antoinette’s trial was shocking to Britons who were horrified by the accusations of incest leveled against the Queen. The bill of indictment read that the Queen “forgetting her quality of mother and the demarcation prescribed by the laws of nature, she has not stopped short of indulging herself with Louis-Charles Capet, her son” (Hunt 109). Central to her trial and execution was the belief that she had been a bad mother. The Queen’s body symbolized both the public and domestic realms in ways that the King’s could not. Whereas the King’s trial focused on his political crimes, the Queen’s primarily dealt with her personal life. Colley notes that the rumours concerning Marie Antoinette’s alleged political corruption, lesbianism and incest were not as widely known in England, and when they were known, they served to deepen the horror of her fate (255).

Yearsley depicts the revolution as a beast that growls and roars, which is set at odds with “*Nature* [that] never Wars” (65). Although in her play *Earl Goodwin* (1789) she supports the uprising of an oppressed peasantry, by 1793 she can no longer support the revolutionary spirit that has been the cause of so much violence in France. The

execution of Marie Antoinette signifies, for her, a breaking of family bonds. The private sphere of domestic relations is viewed as inseparable from the public realm. It should also be remembered that Yearsley herself was a mother who had been wronged by a notable public figure. Landry asserts that “Yearsley specifies women’s possible contributions to a politics that would transform both domestic and public life by collapsing the distinction between them in the interests of greater democracy and participation” (171).

In “Bristol Elegy” (RL 1796), Yearsley comments on the consequences of local violence. In 1793 there was a public uprising against the reinstitution of the Bristol bridge tolls, which resulted in violent military repression. According to Yearsley in her Advertisement, the mob took down the gates and the toll-board. The troops retaliated by killing twenty people and wounding forty more. The ultimate tragedy for Yearsley is the destruction of filial bonds. She describes a murdered father of seven children, one of whom “bends from its mother’s arms/ To snatch the parting kiss” (9-10). The soldiers become killing machines who are “train’d for slaughter.../ And coolly murders e’en the kneeling child” (51-2). Yearsley uses the spectacle of a pregnant woman’s corpse to reinforce her point. In a footnote she explains that a pregnant woman was “found stabbed with a bayonet in the river; supposed to have been thrown in by the soldiery, who opposed the removal of the bodies, some of which drifted down to King’s Road” (p.105). Describing the woman’s murder Yearsley writes, “Behold, assassins! her imploring eye!/ Gaze full on its mild beams, and ye shall feel/ Softer emotions than the sword inspires” (68-70). If the soldiers had allowed themselves to look at their victim as an individual than they would not have been able to murder her.

Her status as a pregnant woman escalates the tragedy because two people were killed in one brutal act. Her description also undermines the notion of the “mob” as found in Burke. This is not an amazonian, militant woman, but a “gentle woman” (66). Yearsley is refuting Burke’s claims that women involved in popular uprisings are necessarily “bad” women and outside of the natural order. Landry asserts that “because she is carrying a child, this woman is not only made excessively vulnerable to the soldier’s weapon, but she is prevented from performing a social duty; her murder doubly outrages” (178). Like Marie Antoinette, this woman was fulfilling her maternal duties as prescribed by Rousseau, and yet both are made brutal spectacles of violence. Yearsley seems to be asking what has gone wrong. Rousseau had argued that if women went back to their natural duties of mothering all social evils would disappear, and Burke argued for a return to chivalry and male protection. Yearsley’s poem unconsciously asserts that ultimately the idealization of and nostalgia over the feminine are ineffective. According to Yearsley, what is needed is radical social change. She states that only “Compassion, love, and sympathy” will heal “spirits raging with destructive fire” (71-2).

Although Yearsley’s poem demonstrates the ineffectiveness of changing society through the idealization of the feminine, since women still remain the victims of violence, she is not above manipulating that sentimentality to capture audience sympathy. By discussing the victimized, maternal body she can claim authority through her own maternal subject position. Yearsley can relate to maternal oppression and victimization because she herself is a mother, and she can appeal to audience sympathy because every person has been born of a mother. Through this strategy, Yearsley legitimates her critique of violence and social oppression.

Yearsley's poetry, especially her later works, demonstrates her involvement with political ideologies and shows how they, sometimes violently, converge with the maternal body. Yearsley believed in the values of French Republicanism, such as liberty and equality, but the increased violence in France had earned her disapproval. The figure of Marie Antoinette came to symbolize how public affairs could violently rupture domestic bonds. In "To Mira" Yearsley asserts that the maternal body, signifying filial attachment, was to be valued over military conquest. Breast-feeding figures prominently in this poem, which coincides with a historically intense cultural concern over nursing. In a time of political and revolutionary upheaval, breast-feeding necessarily curtailed women's public involvement, thereby insuring that women remained within their "proper" and "natural" domestic sphere. Maternity was sentimentalized and idealized as one's national duty. In an ironic twist, however, Yearsley appropriates the sentimentality of the maternal for her own political uses. By appealing to maternal affections she gives herself an authority to speak out against violence, political corruption and class tyranny.

FOUR

The Poetry of Felicia Hemans and The Death of the Maternal Body

Felicia Hemans' marginal status in the canon of today is remarkable considering how popular and successful she was in her own time period, yet feminists who now attempt to seek out overlooked literary women usually ignore Hemans because of the sentimental quality of her work. In a recent anthology of Romantic women poets, Jennifer Breen describes Hemans' work as generally "chauvinistic, sentimental, and derivative" (160). Indeed, many of her poems seem to contradict feminist values. With few exceptions, her female characters are self-effacing, self-sacrificing and embody an ideal rather than represent an individual. It is, however, important for scholars to contextualize Hemans' work, and acknowledge the multiplicity of women's voices in the Romantic period. A study of her work is both intriguing and difficult because she accepted her culture's hegemonic inscription of an essentially feminine and domestic woman. Hemans' acceptance, however, is undermined by the fact that in her poetry the maternal cannot exist in harmony with the current social structure. Evident is a celebration of the domestic realm and filial affection, but the idealization of home is called into question through the absence of the maternal body. Although the mother's literal body is missing, the sentiment that the maternal body represents is ever-present. It is this reliance on sentiment that many feminists find "chauvinistic." Sentimental rhetoric, however, is what gave Hemans the legitimacy she needed to widen women's sphere of influence. Ultimately, she appropriates sentimentality in her conflation of the private and public spheres.

There are striking similarities between the depictions of mothers in the work of Shelley and Hemans. In *Frankenstein*, there are absent mothers like Caroline Beaufort and women like Elizabeth Lavenza who die before they have a chance to become mothers. Likewise, Hemans' mothers are frequently represented as dead or in the act of dying. Both Shelley and Hemans wrote in the first half of the nineteenth-century, when it will be shown that the maternal death rate was higher than it had been in the eighteenth-century. Despite the lack of antiseptic techniques and adequate knowledge about the spread of germs, the maternal death rate was lower in the previous century. One generally assumes that the death of women in childbed had always been high until the late nineteenth-century. It was, after all, not until 1860 that Louis Pasteur first isolated the hemolytic streptococcus that causes puerperal sepsis. Then in 1865, Joseph Lister introduced the use of a carbonic spray to eliminate bacteria from both the air and the patient's wounds (O'Dowd and Philipp 18). Despite these landmarks in the effective management of infection, statistics show that it was safer for a childbearing woman in the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth-century.

Margaret DeLacey's extensive research on the subject found that in eighteenth-century London estimates from the "Bill of Mortality reveal a rate of about 15 per thousand in the first decade of the... century, about 13 per thousand in the middle of the century, and about 9 per thousand in the last decade of the century" (19). Specific British hospitals at the end of the century show very low mortality rates. Between 1790 and 1810, the City of London Lying-in Hospital had a mortality rate of about 5 per thousand, and from 1791 until 1807 the British Lying-in had a rate of about 4 per thousand (DeLacey 26). The statistics show that the maternal death rate had been

steadily decreasing up until the very early years of the nineteenth-century. This has been attributed to the ability of midwives and obstetricians in dealing with common complications in pregnancy and delivery. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, however, the rate rose to startling figures all throughout Europe. The worst rate belongs to France when, in 1861-1864, the Paris Maternité lying-in hospital recorded a mortality rate of 184 per thousand. The average rate, however, for a European hospital at mid-century was 34.2 per thousand (DeLacey 20). British maternity hospitals tended to have lower rates than continental hospitals, but regardless of their better sanitary conditions death rates still rose to above 30 on occasion, the highest rate being 80 per thousand (DeLacey 31).

The climbing rates have been linked to obstetric intervention and over-crowding in maternity wards, which fostered the spread of bacteria. Despite the fact that most maternity patients were in specialized institutions, thereby preventing cross-infection with other patients, once an epidemic started it was hard to contain, and death rates soared. In 1749 William Hunter resigned from the Middlesex Hospital when the administration refused to segregate maternity patients, or to turn the entire hospital into a lying-in ward. Hunter and a group of male-midwives then formed the British lying-in hospital. Ironically, it was in this hospital that the first recorded epidemic of puerperal fever occurred in 1760. It was believed that the infection was introduced by an obstetrician who regularly performed autopsies. The experience traumatized Hunter to the point that he discontinued his anatomical lectures while attending to Queen Charlotte throughout her pregnancy (DeLacey 29). Hunter's precautions may seem extreme, but they were prompted by the medical beliefs of his time which stressed that infections were

extremely contagious. Tragically, the contagion theory fell out of favour in the nineteenth-century, when it was replaced by a miasmatist theory of infection. Miasmatists postulated that the air itself was polluted and focused on the need for ventilation, thus favouring large wards with greater air circulation rather than separate rooms for each patient. Thus, the incidence of puerperal fever epidemics steadily rose in the first half of the nineteenth-century. DeLacey states that a “maternity patient in the mid-nineteenth century faced a chance of dying in hospital approximately seven times greater than the risk she would encounter in a home delivery” (20).

Home delivery was the only option for women of all social classes in the previous centuries. With the rise of the medical establishment, however, specific maternity wards were created so that patients could be more effectively managed. The women who entered lying-in hospitals were poor, and would therefore be under the power of the medical staff. There was very little privacy or choice given to patients. They would be examined and attended by doctors and students alike. The options, then, available to pregnant women were not very agreeable. The most competent and knowledgeable obstetricians were all associated with a specific maternity ward, where the threat of infection was great. One could hire a qualified medical man to come to the home, but that was usually outside the price range of most people. The other option was to hire a local midwife, whether male or female, who was generally less educated and experienced with complications in birth. Due to these unfavourable birthing conditions, death in childbed was a common occurrence in the nineteenth-century. Most women would have been familiar with the threat, probably knowing someone who had died in childbirth and through passing stories among women.

The prevalence of dying women in Hemans' poetry can be seen as a cultural response to a social reality. Three of her poems deal with women who died in childbirth, "The Tomb of Madame Langhans" and two poems on the death of Princess Charlotte. Other poems such as "Pauline" describe the death of the mother as a heroic self-sacrifice. For whatever cause the death is attributed to, the material body of the mother is frequently absent from Hemans' texts. Ironically, it is the socially constructed view of the maternal that fills this textual gap. An idealized notion of maternal affections fills this space, while the body of the mother silently disappears. The absence of this body does reflect the reality of the greater risks of childbirth, but in a less literal sense it also represents a critique of an oppressive social structure that has failed to maintain and fulfill women's lives.

Psycholinguistics may offer another explanation as to why the maternal is predominantly figured as absent in Hemans' work. Lacanian theory argues that before the acquisition of language, the pre-oedipal stage, the child shares a pre-symbolic communication with the mother consisting of nonrepresentational sounds and body language. When the son (both Freud and Lacan formulate their theories from the perspective of the son) acquires language and enters the oedipal crisis his dyadic relationship with his mother gives way to a triadic social structure. It is when the figure of the father enters the scene that the son supposes that the father possesses the phallus, and thus the phallus becomes the signifying element that marks sexual difference. Whereas the son's pre-oedipal relationship to his mother required no difference, he now must relinquish this illusion of wholeness with the mother in order to enter the symbolic realm. In learning language, the son unconsciously realizes that a sign only has meaning

if the subject it signifies is absent. When he enters the symbolic order he submits to the “Law of the Father” that prohibits an incestuous relationship with the mother, and insists on the acceptance of a sign system that depends on difference and the absence of the referent. The son can no longer experience the mother’s body literally or have direct access to reality, but must move from one signifier to another. Through the figuration of language he will move along a metonymic chain endlessly searching for the real subject that the signifier designates. This concept of representation, symbolized by the Law of the Father, mandates both the absence of and desire for the lost object. The maternal body, then, becomes the absent referent that can never be reclaimed. In the words of Terry Eagleton, “we are severed from the mother’s body; after the Oedipus crisis, we will never again be able to attain this precious object, even though we will spend all of our lives hunting for it” (168).

The quest for the lost maternal body and women’s silencing within the symbolic order are themes that are explored in Hemans’ poetry. In “Tomb of Madame Langhams” (SOA 1830), the dead maternal body both represents and critiques women’s silencing within the symbolic realm. Women have no voice within the public arena, and thus death acts as an analogy for their forced silence. It is significant that in the poem the mother cannot speak for herself, and the only remaining testament of her existence is a “silent stone” (17). A statue of the dead mother, with the infant in her arms, is represented as bursting from the sepulcher. Only when the speaker sees this “glorious vision” (18) is the maternal body described as a “captive” with “bondage breaking” (21-2). Only through this act of vision, a literalization of the maternal body, is the silent stone given an active voice. Hemans writes, “thou answer’st” and the inscription on the stone reads, “God of

earth and heaven!/
Here am I, with the child whom thou hast given!" (23-4). Through this act of literalization the mother not only confronts her maker, but also the reader. The maternal body refuses to be the silent, absent referent, but boldly asserts "Here am I" (24). In another sense, the poem itself becomes the voice for the silent mother. By recording her existence, the poet ensures the continuity of the mother's voice.

In "Madeline," aptly subtitled "a Domestic Tale" (ROW 1828), Hemans explores the pre-oedipal bonding between mother and child. Although later psychoanalytic theories would take the perspective of the son as its norm, Hemans' poem discusses the bonding between mother and daughter. The dyadic, pre-symbolic bond is described by the mother as "what words may never tell/
Unto thy mother's bosom, since the days/
When thou wert pillow'd there, and went to raise/
In sudden laughter thence thy loving eye/
That still sought mine" (18-22). Language cannot define this bond. It is expressed through the senses, the comfort of an infant held to the breast, non-determinable sounds, gestures and eye contact. As a form of pre-symbolic body language, the intimacy of eye contact becomes a central motif in the poem. The epigraph by Joanne Baille reads, "And when the world looks cold and surly on us,/ Where can we go to meet a warmer eye/
With such sure confidence as to a mother?" (iv-vi). Evident in this passage is the belief that the world (symbolic order) will be harsh to children. It will replace innocence with experience, and the way back to the love and tenderness one felt in childhood is through a reconnection with the maternal.

The dynamic of loss and retrieval is played out in the poem when a suitor separates the daughter from her mother. The mother is saddened that their bonding "moments are gone by", but insists on "one more gaze" (22-4). Their dyadic relationship

has become triadic through the entry of the suitor, who symbolizes the father since his intrusion insists on the separation between mother and child. As the two say goodbye the daughter, “fell upon her mother’s neck, and wept/ Whilst old remembrances.../ Gush’d o’er her soul” (31-3). The daughter is reluctant to leave her mother for the world of heterosexual love.

Nancy Chodorow’s object relations theory has attempted to fill in the gaps left behind by post-Freudian theories in their explanation of the mother/ daughter dynamic. She proposes that daughters have a continued identification with their mothers past the pre-oedipal stage. This means that a girl’s ego-boundaries are not as rigid as a boy’s tend to be. It is this relationality that allows girls to turn towards their fathers without fully renouncing their mothers. Margaret Homans, in *Bearing the Word* (1989), synthesizes object relations and Lacanian theories. She concludes that since daughters do not renounce their mothers, there is no cause to repress the pre-symbolic language associated with the maternal body. Daughters do not experience an oedipal crisis as such, but enter the symbolic order while still sharing with their mothers a pre-symbolic or literal language.

When the daughter in Hemans’ poem becomes a young widow, she is able to find strength through her prolonged attachment to her mother. After her husband’s death, the daughter is in despair. Through her husband she entered the symbolic order, but now she exists in a “voiceless dwelling” (55). She returns to a pre-oedipal stage of utterance and non-verbal communication. Feverish, she is now in an infantile state in need of constant care and attention. It is in her state of dependency that she recovers the “Love, true and perfect love!” (85) between mother and daughter that restores her to health. The delirium

passes and “from her eyes the spirit look’d at last/ Into her *mother’s* face” (88-9). It is evident that the daughter can oscillate between the symbolic and non-symbolic orders, and it is only when she is completely cut off from the mother’s body, and the order she represents, that the daughter’s well-being is at risk. It is through a reconnection with the maternal, the visual sight of the mother’s face, that “a light sprung up again “ (94) within the daughter. Resting on the “breast/ That rock’d her childhood” the daughter says, ““Sweet mother, gentlest mother! Can it be?”/ [and] The lorn one cried, ‘and do I look on thee?’” (97-100). Once again the eye figures as a symbol of the pre-oedipal, non-verbal exchange between mother and daughter. In the context of dialogue, it acts as a balancing mechanism between the literal and symbolic, the non-representational and language.

This poem is idealistic and acts as a fantasy, in that the father-like figure is removed and the mother and daughter return to their dyadic relationship. The daughter’s childhood is suffused with dream-like images of growth and beauty. Her home was full of “gay vineyards and blue rushing streams/ ...[it was a] sunny land” (72-3). Once the mother and daughter are reunited the mother exclaims, “Peace shall be ours beneath our vines once more” (102). The renewal of the land has a quality of prophetic fulfillment that mimics the *Book of Isaiah*. In the *Book of Isaiah*, God determines that there will be no rain and that the vineyards will bear no fruit and die (5:1-7). Once the people of Jerusalem stop worshipping idols and salvation is received, fecundity is restored to the land (65:17-25). Hemans uses this cycle of growth, destruction, and renewal to symbolize the relationship between mother and daughter. When Madeline leaves her mother to go to distant lands with her new husband, she ends up alone with a grief that “left the green earth dim” (57). It is after Madeline and her mother are reunited that the

mother prophesies a peaceful existence “beneath our vines once more” (102). The renewal of the land represents the renewal of the pre-oedipal, mother/ daughter bond. This bond is founded on the physicality of the mother’s body, and is therefore appropriately figured in the bounty and fecundity of the earth.

Hemans wrote “Madeline” in 1828, a year after her own mother’s death. Irrevocably separated from the maternal body, she envisions a place where mother and daughter can be harmoniously reunited. The attachment Hemans felt for her mother can be evidenced in the fact that within a year of her marriage to Captain Alfred Hemans in 1812, she convinced her husband to return with her and their son to Wales, to live with her mother and sister. Captain Hemans left in 1818 for Italy, and the two never saw each other again, although they corresponded concerning the education of their sons. Hemans remained in her mother’s house until her mother died in 1827, after which she offered to join Captain Hemans in Italy, but he rejected her offer. The reasons for the separation are obscure, but William Michael Rossetti suggests that one reason may have been that “the family affections of daughter and mother were more dominant and vivid in Mrs. Hemans than conjugal love” (vii). He continues that “her intense feeling of the sacredness of home... may have set before her, as more binding and imperative, the duties of service to her own mother, and of guidance to her own children, than the more equal, passionate, and in some sense self-indulgent relation between wife and husband” (vii). Ann Mellor seems to concur when she writes, “for Felicia Hemans, [the] mother-daughter love was more intense, enduring, and rewarding than heterosexual love” (135). For whatever reasons her marriage failed, Hemans’ celebration of a wife’s primary affection for her husband conflicted with her own experience. It is not surprising, then, that many of her

female characters are victims of abandonment or unrequited love. Maternal affections, however, remain enduring and strong. It is for social, rather than emotional, reasons that maternal ties are broken.

“Madeline” is an unusual poem for Hemans because mother and daughter are reunited at the end of the poem. More common is a poem like “The Memorial Pillar” (ROW 1828), where mother and daughter are irrevocably separated. Hemans explains in the prefatory material to the poem that she found a small pillar on the road-side that was erected in 1656 by Ann, Countess Dowager of Pembroke, as a memorial of her final parting with her mother. The reason for this last parting, which overall seems less important than the actual act of separation, is not given. As in “Madeline” the parting scene is full of emotional hyperbole. Hemans writes, “Blessings and tears of holiest flow,/ Ev’n here were fondly shed,/ Thou from the passion of thy grief,/ In its full burst, couldst draw relief” (21-4). Hemans continues that “no other eye/ Could give thee back thine infancy./ No other voice could pierce.../ ... thy breast,/ ... No other smile to thee could bring/ A gladd’ning, like the breath of spring” (35-42). The suggestion that no other love can replace that first love we experience as children links back to a line near the beginning of the poem that simply asserts that a mother’s love is “The *one* love changing not” (16).

The only poem of Hemans’ that contradicts this sentiment can be found in “The Lady of the Castle” (ROW 1828), which discusses the abandonment of a child by a mother. In it, the mother runs off to become a King’s mistress, only to see the error of her ways too late. A fallen woman, she returns to her home years later to seek out her daughter. The daughter does not recognize her and shrinks back from her touch. The

mother's death, caused from the child's rejection, is a moral judgment on Hemans' part on the mother's destruction of domestic affections. For Hemans, the love between mother and child is the strongest and most fundamental tie between two people, and therefore is the most sacred.

Hemans' love for her own mother can be found in her poem "To My Mother" (DA 1812). Written the year that she got married, the poem celebrates (perhaps even memorializes) the mother/ daughter bond. Once again she uses natural images to symbolize this bond. Hemans writes, "Who sow'd the germ, with tender hand?/ Who mark'd its infant-leaves expand?/ My mother's fost'ring care" (5-7). It was her mother who tended to the garden of her mind. "She lov'd to cherish and adorn/ Each blossom of the soil;/ To banish ev'ry weed and thorn,/ That oft oppos'd her toil!" (11-4). Like Yearsley's poem to her mother, Hemans' poem also represents the mother/ daughter bond as a source of strength. Yearsley describes how her mother shielded her from "life's keen tempest" and from "inclement skies." In a similar vein, Hemans asserts that "filial love, with soothing voice/ ... shall teach thee to rejoice;/ E'en *then*, shall sweeter, milder sound,/ When sorrow's tempest raves around;/ While dark misfortune's gales destroy,/ The frail, mimosa-buds of hope and joy!" (57-62). Both writers assume that life is harsh, and only filial affections can provide the emotional stability needed to endure life's trials.

Both "Madeline" and "To My Mother" suggest that the bond between mother and child can provide one with a source of strength. The poem "Pauline" (ROW 1828), however, depicts the destructive and self-sacrificial nature that bond can necessitate. Mothers must continually sacrifice their identities for their children. In "Pauline" the mother's sacrifice of identity is literally played out through her death. At a public

banquet, the mother and daughter are separated when a fire breaks out. The daughter “in fear’s cold grasp alone,/ Powerless hath sunk within the blazing pile” (57-8). Pauline cannot find her daughter and rushes in the burning building in an attempt to save her. Hemans writes, “But oh! thy strength, deep love! – there is no power/ To stay the mother from that rolling grave” (61-2). The mother and daughter unite for a moment and then die together in the blaze.

Hemans asks, “Was one brief meeting theirs, one wild farewell?/ And died they heart to heart? – Oh who could tell? (71-2). Although Hemans is definite in her description of Pauline’s actions as heroic, her questions undermine the sentimentalization around such a heroic feat. She seems to be suggesting that a mother’s self-sacrifice is absolute, and yet the sentimental rhetoric surrounding it may be faulty. These questions are pauses in the text that unconsciously undermine the authority of sentimental rhetoric and the glorification of maternal sacrifice. After these questions, however, Hemans lapses back into sentimentalization. Hemans laments that there are no ruins to record “all that woman’s heart had dared and done” (80). It is evident that Hemans wants to elevate women’s affections as something heroic, and yet the only remaining testament of Pauline’s sacrifice is a portrait that hung round her neck of her daughter. Although Hemans’ poetry seeks to give honour to mothers who sacrifice themselves for their children, whether with their identities or more literally their lives, it does so by idealizing a self-sacrificial nature as something innately born within women.

Hemans’ poetry essentializes maternal nature. In a typical passage Hemans describes Pauline as possessing “something holier” (15) than youthful beauty. She has a “charm with graver, tenderer, sweetness fraught-/ The blending of deep love and matron

thought” (17-8). Hemans’ descriptions of mothers are sentimental and romantic. At a time when women were seen as inferior subjects, this rhetoric positively defined women as courageous and honourable. Alan Richardson notes that early feminists like Macauley and Wollstonecraft chose to represent women as rational, thereby moving away from the realm of sentiment which they had been traditionally relegated to (21). By the time Hemans was writing, the radical aspects of the late eighteenth-century were over. As we have seen in chapter two, the executions of public women in the French Revolution served to remind women that their “place” was in the home. A new sentimentality arose around the domestic woman, whose civic duty it was to bear and care for children. Writers like Hemans became very successful by being known as “the poet of the heart.” By creating romantic heroines who maintained conventional norms of femininity, Hemans did not risk alienating herself from society or her work from its market. Abandoned by her husband, Hemans’ books needed to be profitable to help support her five children. And they did sell, Hemans being one of the most widely read poets during her time.

Hemans’ poetry, however, did not simply mimic this new sentimental rhetoric. There is evident within her heroines a dynamic between conventionally female and male virtues. Heroines found in poems such as “The Forest Sanctuary” and “The Indian City” are described in feminine terms while also possessing a dignified courage. They epitomize the traditional female virtues of piety, self-sacrifice, emotionality and nurturance. Contrasting this, however, are words or descriptions that are usually typified as masculine such as courageous, warrior-like, energy, spirit and glory. Hemans integrates these descriptions of power into an otherwise traditional discourse on maternal

self-sacrifice. Hemans complicates the distinction between the public, masculine sphere and the female, domestic realm by attempting to elevate the feminine realm of sentiment to be on equal footing as the masculine.

Hemans' attempt to represent the female world of sentiment and maternal self-sacrifice as equal to masculine heroism can be seen in her correlation between a soldier's death in war and a woman's death in childbirth. Both, according to Hemans, should be honoured as patriots. In both "Death of the Princess Charlotte" (*British Female Poets* 1848) and "Stanzas on the Death of the Princess Charlotte" (*Poetical Works* 1853), Hemans describes the Princess's death after giving birth to a stillborn baby boy. Charlotte had become a favorite of the royal family, and despite her status, ordinary women could identify with her domestic trials [fig 4.1]. Historian Linda Colley notes that the Princess frequently argued with her father, sided with her mother against him, and rejected the suitor the King had selected for her (270-1). She instead married Prince Leopold for love, and by all accounts they were very compatible. She then tragically died in 1817, idealized as a romantic heroine who was cut down in the prime of her youth. The details of her death were very shocking to the public. Her labour had lasted for over fifty hours, and rumours that her death was caused by the incompetence of one of her physicians, Sir Robert Croft, led him to commit suicide.

The importance placed on the Princess's death by women can be seen in their enthusiastic response to commemorate her. The Duchess of York started a subscription to build a monument, which was initially limited to women. However, with much protest, the subscription was opened up to everyone. No one was allowed to contribute



4.1 Sir Thomas Lawrence's *Princess Charlotte during her pregnancy*, 1817. Note the position of her arms. The left arm comes up, making her wedding ring visible, and her right arm protectively covers her abdomen. Reprinted from Thea Holme's *Prinny's Daughter: A Life of Princess Charlotte of Wales*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976.



4.2 Matthew Wyatt's *Monument to Princess Charlotte*, 1821, can be found in St. George's Chapel at Windsor. Note the two figures of the Princess, the corporeal body that is covered by a shroud and Charlotte's spirit which ascends to heaven. Reprinted from T.S.R. Boase's *The Oxford History of English Art: English Art 1800-1870*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1959.

more than a guinea, equal to one pound one shilling. During this time a guinea could buy a book on history or *belles lettres*, and a guinea or two could purchase a yearly subscription to a circulating library (Porter 235). A guinea was not an exorbitant amount of money, and was within the means of a working-class family. The cap on the donation thereby acted in a democratic fashion, ensuring that the monument belonged to the general public. The final amount collected for the monument was over 12,000 pounds (Penny 327), which was sent to Matthew Wyatt who created a massive marble sculpture in full relief. It represents the dead Princess's body under a shroud, with another figure symbolizing her spirit, soaring up to the heavens. On either side of the Princess's body are angels, one of which carries the infant. Below them are two veiled figures of mourners [fig 4.2]. This large monument was placed in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, where orange glass set in the west window created the effect of a heavenly glow (Boase 146).

N. B. Penny states that the monument's theme is that of the assumption. Wyatt's monument was modeled after a painting "The Apotheosis of Princess Charlotte," in which "the princess appears in a context usually reserved even for Roman Catholics for the Virgin Mary alone" (Penny 327). This painting, by Arthur William Devis, depicts the princess being carried up to heaven by angels, one of which carries the dead child (Boase 145). Colley asserts that for the Protestant women of England, the Princess became a substitute for "the cult of the Virgin" (272). Indeed, many of the popular prints issued after her death copy their poses from older images of the assumption. But the Princess's death signified more than a Protestant stand-in for the virgin, it also gave women a specifically female focus for their patriotism. Most importantly, "she dignified by

example the mundane, private life of many ordinary female Britons” (Colley 272-3).

Through the valorization of her death, she had become a national heroine.

The Princess’s death, along with that of her baby, was felt not only as a monarchical crisis but also as a national tragedy. Shops and theaters were closed, and all official and commercial activity was suspended until after the funeral (Schor 197). The funeral procession itself was an elaborate spectacle. It contained six mourning carriages (three of which were empty), one hundred armed soldiers marching and then another four hundred soldiers lining the funeral route (Eubanks 87). All over the country people crowded into churches for memorial services. In one London church, it was reported that the minister grew afraid of the mobs of people and attempted to cancel the service. The people demanded to hear the service, at which time the Lord Mayor was called in to dismiss them. The people refused to leave, and eventually the minister was called back to the church to do the service (Eubanks 101). All of this attests to the amount of public sympathy the Princess’s death elicited. Esther Schor states that the nation’s mourning is evident from the “nearly two hundred extant documents published within weeks (or in some cases, months)” of the fatal day (197). Kevin Eubanks agrees that one of the defining aspects of this tragedy was the amount of public commemoration it brought about [figs 4.3 & 4.4]. “Articles in journals and newspapers, memorial picture cards, cheap broadsides, expensive volumes – all mourned Princess Charlotte” (Eubanks 100). Some of the most notable poetic talents of the time eulogized the Princess, including Robert Southey, Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The excessive amount of public mourning occurred because Britons had placed their hope exclusively on Charlotte. As Schor puts it, by 1817 an “old, mad, blind...



4.3 Frontispiece to Edwin B. Hamilton's *A Record of the Life and Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte*, 1818. Note how the Princess's form is etherialized within the clouds. Reprinted from N.B. Penny's "English Church Monuments to Women who Died in Childbed Between 1780 and 1835." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975): 314-32.



4.4 Frontispiece to Thomas Green's *Memoirs of Her late Royal Highness Charlotte Augusta of Wales and of Saxe Coburg*, 1818. Here there are two representations of Charlotte. One is a spiritualized version, and the other the corporeal body surrounded by the grieving. Such depictions were influential to Matthew Wyatt when designing his monument to the Princess. Reprinted from the same text as above.

King; a frivolous, scandal-ridden Regent; a dissolute Princess of Wales in exile; and an ill-assorted group of royal siblings who seemed indifferent to the nation's need for legitimate heirs; had strained the symbolic embodying function of the royal family to the breaking point" (228). Princess Charlotte, by contrast, engaged in charitable works, had made a love match and then conceived an heir to the throne. The couple then distanced themselves from the frivolity of the court through their retirement at Claremont house. It was "in such a Princess, [that] the British nation had finally the promise of a domesticated royal family" (Schor 228). The focus on the Princess's domestic virtues also was highlighted in the texts commemorating her. As a member of the royal family she necessarily was a public figure, but it was her private roles of daughter, wife and expectant mother that became the focus of public attention.

In Percy Shelley's pamphlet *"We Pity the Plumage, but Forget the Dying Bird": An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte* (1817), he suggests that one of the reasons this event held the public imagination was because so many could relate to the tragedy. He writes, "the death of the Princess Charlotte has in common with the death of thousands. How many women die in childbed and leave their families of motherless children and their husbands to live on, blighted by the remembrance of that heavy loss?" (73). Shelley then likens the Princess to "thousands of others equally distinguished as she, for private excellences, who have been cut off in youth and hope" (75). For Shelley, the Princess's death should be privately mourned because it was a private tragedy. He contrasts this with the three Derbyshire labourers who were executed for their involvement in the Pentridge revolt of June 1817. Schor asserts that "Shelley boldly defines the Princess's death as an occasion of private mourning, and the laborers'

death as one warranting public mourning” (201). The Princess’s domesticity and “private excellences” preclude her from public activity, and the very ordinariness of her death makes her unworthy of public sympathy and commemoration.

Hemans, in “Death of the Princess Charlotte,” comes to a much different conclusion than Shelley concerning the relationship between the private and public spheres. Like Shelley, Hemans also draws attention to the Princess’s domestic virtues in an attempt to represent her as “every woman.” She becomes a model of feminine piety in her acceptance of God’s will. Through “thy pangs which smiled” and “vain longings” over her “lifeless child... still thy patient eye,/ ... beam’d holy constancy!” (11-4). Hemans continues, “Amidst those agonies.../ Thy pale lip, quivering with convulsive throes,/ Breathed not a plaint – and settled in repose” (16-8). These descriptions present Charlotte suffering through a difficult delivery, yet still remaining calm and devout. Hemans follows convention in that a woman enduring such a trial should turn towards God. Less conventionally, however, she brings in the Princess’s relationship to the state. She has died serving the state in what, according to Hemans, is the fulfillment of her womanly duty. As such, “Love, glory, empire, claim’d thee for his own” (22). Although viewing childbirth as a national duty has its obvious drawbacks, Hemans is able to use this belief to elevate women’s status. Like a soldier who dies in battle, the woman who dies in childbirth should be honoured. Thus Charlotte’s “pure, majestic spirit” will be “Hallow’d by freedom, and enshrined in song” (34-5). Whereas Shelley’s *Address* uses the ideology of separate spheres to demonstrate women’s utter incompatibility with public life, Hemans’ uses it to complicate the issues at hand by conflating private and

public grief. Although she does equate femininity and maternity with domesticity, she views the domestic, private affections as being constitutive of the national character.

Inherent in Hemans' view is the belief that the Princess's domestic status would not be a threat to her ability to rule the nation had she lived. This view is put forth in her "Stanzas on the Death of the Princess Charlotte." In this poem, domesticity is not inconsistent with being a public figure. In conventional terms the Princess is seen as "England's royal flower... broken by the blast!" (10). This femininity, however, does not act in a way that confines the Princess to the domestic sphere. Rather, on her "was fixed the patriot's ardent eye" (55). Besides this instance there are two other examples in which Hemans refers to Charlotte as being the focus of "England's gaze" (59) and "a nation's gaze" (73). The emphasis on the public gaze serves to remind readers that although they may idealize the Princess's domestic attributes, she was by nature of her position a public figure. As a woman who bridges both the private and public spheres, Hemans has no difficulty in defining the Princess as both a "cherished flower" (43) and an "Heiress of empires!" (75).

Eubanks notes that the epigraph to Hemans' poem is from Bossuet's funeral oration on Henriette-Anne of England, who played an instrumental role in the secret negotiations between Charles II and Louis XIV that led to the Treaty of Dover. Eubanks argues that Hemans' epigraph immediately establishes "a parallel between Charlotte and an earlier, powerful princess, one active in the supposedly masculine area of politics. Consistent with Bossuet's elegy, Hemans portrays Charlotte with a combination of conventionally masculine and feminine characteristics" (175). This is evident in Hemans' depiction of Charlotte as active and powerful. She is described as possessing a

“soul commanding” (32), “towering mind” (39), and is personified as “that regal daughter of the main” (97) who has “guided Europe through her darkest hour” (108).

The sentimental rhetoric of domesticity returns at the end of the poem when the Princess is etherialized into a domestic angel. Hemans concludes that Charlotte was one of the lucky few who escaped from the dismal disappointment of life. She did not live to see her “people changed” (196) or to hear her name “breathed in a ruder tone” (199). Having escaped from life’s grief, Charlotte becomes an angel who soothes broken hearts and comforts the lonely. Eubanks reads this image of Charlotte as a household angel as an attempt to prevent a “harsh public reaction by reforming Charlotte in the popular mold” (201-2). In Eubanks view, Hemans had sold out. By the end of her poem, her strong female character came in line with conventional norms of femininity. It is, however, Hemans’ use of sentimental rhetoric that gave the poem its wide audience and acceptance. By appealing to conventional norms of femininity, Hemans could lay claim to a larger sphere of influence for women without risking alienation from her audience. This is evident near the beginning of the poem when Hemans uses traditional feminine imagery when describing Charlotte as a “cherished flower” (43) that was cropped down in early life. This conventional image is used as a starting point, from which Hemans continues that Charlotte’s death need not only be applied to a cut down flower but also to “lost heroes in their noon of pride” (45) and to a “soaring genius died... [in] mid career!” (47-8). Hemans reliance on sentimental rhetoric lays the foundation for less conventional associations.

Whereas in “Death of the Princess Charlotte” the Princess’s connection to the state was made explicit through her ability to affect national character, in “Stanzas”

Charlotte's link to the state is through her lineage. She had sprung "from a race of Kings and heroes" (33), and possessed "a spirit as lofty as her line" (34). Her power, in part, was predicated on her ability to produce an heir, and when she died "with a father's hopes a nation's fled" (144). The maternal body is represented as powerful through its ability to carry on the patrilineal line. As such, the maternal body has been appropriated by the state and made complicit in the perpetuation of patriarchy. It was argued in the previous chapter that writers such as Rousseau asserted the necessity of women breeding more citizens and then raising them as patriots. This view was double-edged for women. It gave them a sense of dignity and importance in their maternal role, but also made them instrumental in the continuation of an institution that ultimately oppressed them. The limited form of power it accorded them, however, was enough to persuade women that their needs were the same as the state's.

The tension between mothers and the state can be seen in the promotion of militarism. This is evident in Hemans' "The Queen of Prussia's Tomb" (ROW 1828). In this poem, Hemans discusses the marble statue that commemorates the Queen's death. This statue has an eagle at her feet, and although this is a "Kingly emblem" (21), Hemans declares that the Queen "was a mother – in her love/ How sorrowfully true!" (27-8). The statue also wears "pale garlands" (25), hung on it by her children. The statue, then, combines the symbolism of kingship through the eagle and the symbolism of maternal affection through the garlands. As a representation of the maternal body, the statue becomes a site of political conflict. Maternal love is replaced by maternal revenge, as the statue comes to represent the Queen's need to see her children succeed to the throne. In a time of political upheaval, the domestic and military worlds violently collide creating a

struggle for power. "Then was her name a note that rung/ To rouse bold hearts from sleep,/ Her memory, as a banner flung/ Forth by the Baltic deep;/ Her grief, a bitter vial pour'd/ To sanctify th' avenger's sword" (43-8). As a maternal figure, the Queen's death inspires soldiers to fight for the country so that her children may inherit the throne. No longer are the private, domestic world of mothers and the public, political realm of men separated.

Hemans viewed domestic duties as patriotic in an attempt to valorize women's deaths in childbed. As previously mentioned, Hemans was writing in a time when maternal death rates were exceedingly high. There is, however, another underlying motive that can be seen in the poems about Princess Charlotte and more explicitly in "The Queen of Prussia's Tomb." It gave Hemans a strategy in which she could legitimate her interest in politics and military affairs. In a letter to her Aunt, Hemans writes, "My whole heart and soul are interested in the gallant patriots [of the Peninsula War] and though females are forbidden to interfere in politics, yet as I have a dear, dear brother... in the scene of action, I may be allowed to feel some ardor" (Lootens 239). Hemans is quite aware that as a woman society dictates that certain topics are not to be discussed. However, she publicly states her views on militarism without offending social norms by discussing them within the discourse of sentiment and the maternal. Marlon Ross notes that Hemans placed "her political interest behind the veil of domesticity" (285). Pinning down Hemans' views on women's relation to militarism is a difficult task. In one sense she promotes militarism, identifying mothers as warriors who will do battle to protect or revenge their children. In other instances, however, the maternal body is at odds with militarism. Mothers create life, whereas soldiers destroy life.

In “The Indian City” (ROW 1838) Hemans at first seems to be promoting militarism as something intimately connected to maternal nature. In this poem a Muslim boy is murdered for trespassing on sacred, Indian ground. His mother avenges his death by causing a war that brings down the entire city. Tricia Lootens asserts that in Hemans’ poetry the “exhilaration... [in which mothers] avenge their families dissolution often blurs the line between self-sacrifice and rage” (243). More specifically, Lootens writes that in “Indian City” if the mother had not “left home in pilgrimage, the Indians would not have slaughtered her son; and had she not sought revenge, the lost Indian city would have continued to stand. Still, this mother is a disturbing reminder that good women may support or even inspire bad wars” (245). Lootens is accusatory in her judgment that the carnage of the war all stems from the mother wanting to go on pilgrimage. Surely this is not a transgressive act. Hemans describes the mother as a pious woman with a “quiet smile” (56) who loved natural beauty. It is when her son is senselessly murdered that her actions turn “bad.” The son, near death, stumbles back home and “look’d for the face to his young heart sweet,/ And found it, and sank at his mother’s feet” (73-4).

He dies there, and his mother vows that she shall not mourn his death until revenge is achieved. Hemans writes, “On the silent lip she press’d no kiss, too stern was the grasp of her pangs for this;/ She shed no tear as her face bent low” (113-5). Hemans transforms this gentle mother into a heroine of epic proportions. Contrary to the feminine virtues of passivity and modesty, the mother takes an active stance and unveils her face. The charged language Hemans uses can be seen in the description, “She rose/ Like a prophetess from dark repose!// And proudly flung from her face the veil” (123-5). She is described as possessing a “dauntless mood, “ “regal passion high,” “strength of her step”

and a “heart that burn’d” (128-40). Just as in “The Queen of Prussia’s Tomb,” the Queen’s grief sanctifies the avenger’s sword, so too does the Muslim mother’s words act as a “spell to unsheath the sword” (164). With her “eye’s wild flash” (173) and a voice that could “kindle that lightening flame” (170), the mother tells her tragic story to band together an army to topple the Indian city. Susan J. Wolfson explains that the “kindling gaze, the unveiled face, and unbound hair are Hemans’s codes for the eruption of female power from cultural norms” (150).

Although Lootens accurately asserts that the mother promotes and inspires the war, she does not delve deeper into the outcome of the connection between militarism and maternal grief. Hemans, in fact, takes an ambivalent stance towards the possibility that one can sufficiently support the other. The energy exerted in her revenge takes its toll on her health, for she was “ne’er for such conflicts born” (192). As the war progresses, she becomes increasingly weak and ill. The narrator exclaims, “Vain, bitter glory!... cannot fill/ ... the deep void of the heart” (179-82). Near the end of the poem, maternal nature is put at odds with war. Close to her death, the mother “murmur’d a low sweet cradle song,/ Strange midst the din of a warrior throng” (201-2). Although the mother sought revenge, it did nothing to diminish her grief. Those who are killed in the war she inspired are inexorably linked to her. When the city falls, the land it once rested upon becomes the gravesite of both her and her son. Hemans describes the toppled towers and palaces and concludes that this “was the work of one deep heart wrung!” (226). Although the message seems to be that a mother’s agony knows no bounds, the poem makes clear that revenge did not lessen her grief. Maternal revenge and militarism are unstably united with tragic consequences.

Hemans is much more straightforward in her criticism of militarism in “The Image in Lava” (ROW 1828). In a footnote Hemans explains that this poem eulogizes the death of a mother and her infant, whose forms were uncovered in the nineteenth-century at the excavation of the ancient city of Herculaneum. Although excavations of both Pompeii and Herculaneum had begun in the early eighteenth-century, there came a revised interest in Herculaneum when in 1827 an old excavation shaft was found on the property of the De Bisogno family (Kraus 119). In January 1828, the excavation project began anew with great enthusiasm. Hemans’ poem eulogizes one of the figures found probably in residential quarters. The bodies excavated were “covered by the masses of liquid and miry lava which little by little hardened and cooled to form a kind of stony shell in which the body decomposed normally. Their corpses exist therefore, in the rocky magma, within the mould of a void which preserves the shape of the body” (Brion 35). This figure provided Hemans with a metaphor of the ideal image of the maternal captured in stone. Unlike the previous monuments discussed, this monument was not created by man for the act of public mourning. Rather, it is an accidental monument nature cast up to “enshrine” maternity [fig 4.5]. As a “rude monument/ cast in affection’s mould” (35-6) it “Survives the proud memorials rear’d/ By conquerors of mankind” (11-2). Hemans describes the woman who, in death, clasped the child to her chest, “the only treasure.../ Whereon a hope might rest (23-4). The nameless mother is reduced to that one function, and exists as a timeless ideal of the essence of woman’s nurturing capabilities.

This ever-lasting symbol of motherhood outlasts empires built by men. Hemans writes, “Temple and tower have mouldered,/ Empires from earth have passed,/ And woman’s heart hath left a trace/ Those glories to outlast!” (5-8). In one sense, then, this



4.5 Corpse of a Pompeiian encrusted in hard lava, found near the Porta di Nuceria. Like the figure praised in Hemans' "Image in Lava," this figure was not meant to be an object of public mourning. Reprinted from Marcel Brion's *Pompeii and Herculaneum: The Glory and the Grief*. Trans. John Rosenberg. Toronto: Elek Books, 1960.

monument reduces woman to her status as a mother, but it also offers a celebration of the maternal over war and conquest. Empires may be built and then fall, but maternal affections will remain. Harding notes the problematic position of women within the poem by stating that the “woman’s existence is recorded but at the cost of the complete obliteration of her actual identity” (144). It can, however, be viewed in another way. By appealing to the feminine sphere of maternal affections, Hemans legitimizes her critique of military conquest. Colley states that the “belief in a distinctive sphere could... paradoxically, legitimize women’s intervention in affairs hitherto regarded as the preserve of men” (273). Although the maternal subject position was limiting, it also gave women the cultural power to invoke a supposed moral superiority.

In Hemans’ dramatic poem *The Siege of Valencia* (1823), maternal affections are again at odds with the demands of a military state. It begins with the announcement that the Muslim army has captured the two sons of Gonzalez, the Governor of Valencia, and that the two boys will be executed unless the City surrenders. Gonzalez’s wife Elmina insists that they surrender, but Gonzalez values military glory over family bonds. Hemans argues for a form of maternal courage that differs from the masculine code of militarism in its elevation of family fidelity over patriotic duty. Elmina asserts,

Think’st thou there dwells no courage but in breasts
That set their mail against the ringing spears,
When helmets are struck down? - Thou little know’st
Of nature’s marvels! - Chief! my heart is nerved
To make its way through things which warrior-men,
-Aye, they master death by field and flood,
Would look on, ere they braved! - I have no thought,
No sense of fear! - Thou’rt mighty! But a soul
Wound up like mine is mightier, in the power
Of that one feeling, pour’d through all its depths,
Than monarchs with their hosts! - Am I not come
To die with these, my children? (157).

Similar to Yearsley, who in "To Mira" distances herself from female militancy, Hemans's speaker also distinguishes her form of bravery from violence. Her courage comes from the love she has for her children. This "one feeling pour'd through all its depths" gives her more strength than "warrior men."

Ann Mellor argues that when "the private and the public come into direct conflict... when maternal love fights against a heroic commitment to a religious and nationalistic cause, the domestic ideology on which Hemans' poetry is grounded both triumphs and collapses" (135-6). Devoted to her children, Elmina attempts to sway her husband, but he is unyielding. She then seeks help from a Priest who also refuses her. No one will help her despite the fact that everyone admits that the city will fall in any case. Disease is widespread and there is a shortage of water and food. She argues that their surrender will not only spare the lives of her sons, but also save those of the few remaining citizens. Unable to convince the citizens to surrender, she bravely enters the enemy camp in an attempt to plead with the leader of the Muslim army to release her sons. He, however, is as much committed to military victory as Elmina's husband. By the end of the play, Elmina is the only survivor of her family. Her husband, daughter and sons all died in a final attack against the Muslims.

Hemans critiques the patriarchal state and militarism for its destruction of the domestic realm. Whereas in Hemans' earlier poetry the maternal body was silenced through death, and commemorated through public monuments or poetry, here the opposite occurs. The maternal enters the public realm, to be placed at odds with the interests of the state. And yet she is the only one who remains at the end of the play, and her voice is what commemorates those who have died. Hemans utilizes the maternal

subject position to critique the patriarchal state, with its focus on militarism and conquest.

Elmina asserts, “It is but pride, wherewith/ To his fair son the father’s eye doth turn,/ Watching his growth. Aye, on the boy he looks,/ The bright glad creature springing in his path,/ But as the heir of his great name, the young/ And stately tree, whose rising strength ere long/ Shall bear his trophies well. – And this is love!/ This is *man*’s love!”

(120-1). The demands that maternal love be sacrificed to patriotic duty are not seen as merely private matters, but as injustices that have far-reaching social consequences. The destruction of the domestic sphere is seen as a political matter.

Hemans’ work celebrates the feminine world and domestic affections, which seems to promote a hegemonic inscription of women as essentially nurturers. Her female characters generally are self-sacrificing and self-effacing. And yet, the position of the maternal within her works offers a subversive critique of the current social structure. Mothers are either absent, in the act of dying or placed at odds with the state. The fact that the private and public spheres cannot exist together harmoniously can be seen as a critique of women’s powerlessness in preventing such tragedies. But this is not to argue that Hemans accepts women’s powerlessness. Rather, she offers a different way of valuing the feminine. She hints at a world where the domestic affections are placed above the interests of the state, where women’s courage and tragedies will be of national importance, and where women will be celebrated as heroines.

Five

Conclusion: Forms of Maternal Power

The writings of Mary Shelley, Ann Yearsley and Felicia Hemans demonstrate how women, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, responded to their culture's construction of maternity. The maternal body was defined, and continues to be redefined, in various ways to serve different political and ideological agendas. Woman's ability to give birth and nurse children has long been used against her in an attempt to confine her to the domestic sphere. Images of domestic maternity can be found in all forms of cultural production. Even the supposedly "unbiased" claims of science have been used to legitimate woman's oppression. Far from being "disinterested," scientific and medical treatises are informed by the same constructions of femininity and masculinity that permeate any given culture. During the Romantic movement, the new sentimental rhetoric surrounding maternity was evident in a variety of literary, medical, philosophical and artistic texts. This sentimentality sought to naturalize and dignify mothering in an attempt to keep women content in their traditional role, and prevent them from pursuing public activities.

Despite the obvious limitations and drawbacks of viewing maternity as woman's special vocation, women were able to re-appropriate the sentimentality surrounding maternity as a way to assert their moral superiority. They could then justify their intervention into political matters on the grounds that they, as the preservers of morality, had the right to protect their children from corruption, violence and tyranny. This is not to assert that the rhetoric was liberating for women, but rather that it could be

manipulated in a variety of unexpected ways. Shelley utilized the rhetoric to show that when women are excluded from reproduction and childcare the results can only be disastrous. Frankenstein took it upon himself to create offspring, but instead produced a monster because he by-passed the need for the maternal body. This is especially relevant today where there exists the possibility of test-tube babies and cloning. Although some women may feel liberated by the possibility of having children without going through pregnancy and delivery, others feel that technology is the tool created by men in an attempt to usurp women's special power.

Feminists have long disputed whether motherhood was a "curse" or a "blessing." Some radical feminists of the sixties and seventies, such as Shulamith Firestone, wanted to eliminate motherhood because of the oppression mothers endured. More modern schools of feminism, however, tend to view motherhood as a form of power. Most notably, Luce Irigaray asserts that the biological and psychic processes of childbirth and mothering provide women with the ability to establish relationships of reciprocity based on a healing and transformative power. Julia Kristeva also sees motherhood as potentially empowering for its erasure of subject/ object boundaries, but in our patriarchal society the maternal is repressed and made abject. Although these feminists use modern theories and terminology, the larger debates their works encompass are not new. Earlier writers such as Yearsley and Hemans viewed the mother/ daughter bond as a source of strength, maternal affections as an ethic of care and the foundation for positive social change. The images of violence towards the maternal body in Yearsley's work, and the death of the maternal body in Hemans' show that society was failing women.

Although the feminists of the sixties lay claim to the saying “the private is political,” women were advocating this belief since the late eighteenth-century. Early literary women asserted that if women were to remain within the domestic sphere, then they had a right to protect it. Issues such as reproduction, breast-feeding and childcare were argued to have consequences not just to the family but also to the community and the nation. Governments and medical institutions also saw these issues as political, since they saw it fit to regulate and control mothers. This continues, to a lesser degree, in our own day as legislators attempt to regulate abortion and reproductive technologies. Motherhood is political, and images of the maternal body will continue to be invoked and redefined for a range of political concerns.

Despite more choices and reliable forms of birth control available to modern women, the “naturalness” of motherhood as a female occupation persists. The social power women are able to claim by asserting their maternal subject position also continues. Many women’s groups argue that their nurturing capacities as mothers make them “natural” advocates for human rights and environmental issues. Wiccan and North American spiritualities believe that maternity gives women a unique and sacred link to the earth. Whether one agrees with this or not, it cannot be denied that maternity is being re-appropriated by women as a form of power that hopes to bring about positive social change. The maternal body will continue to be redefined for a range of meanings and purposes, and only when women reclaim this body will they be able to fully empower themselves.

BIBLIOGRAPHY - Primary Documents

- Bethune, George Washington. The British Female Poets: with Biographical and Critical Notices. 1848. Essay Index Reprint Series. New York: Books for Libraries P, 1972.
- Burke, Edmund. Reflections on the Revolution in France. 1790. Ed. Thomas H. D. Mahoney. Indianapolis: Liberal Arts P, 1955.
- Cadogan, William. "An Essay upon Nursing and the Management of Children, From their Birth to Three Years of Age." 1748. The Father of Child Care: Life of William Cadogan (1711-1797). Bristol: John Wright & Sons, 1966. Appendix, 1-34.
- Durant, Clark ed. "The European Magazine, April 1798 (33: 246-51)." Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft. New York: Haskell House, 1969. 340-1.
- Godwin, William. Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft. New York: Haskell House, 1969.
- Hemans, Felicia. Records of Woman, with Other Poems. Ed. Donald H. Reiman. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Songs of Affections, with Other Poems. Ed. Donald H. Reiman. New York: Garland, 1978.
- "Stanzas on the Death of the Princess Charlotte." The Poetical Works of Felicia Hemans: Complete in One Volume. Memoir by Mrs. L.H. Sigourney. Boston: Phillips and Sampson, 1853. 110-3.
- The Domestic Affections and Other Poems. Ed. Donald H. Reiman. New York: 1978.
- The Siege of Valencia; A Dramatic Poem. The Last Constantine: with Other

- Poems. London, John Murray, 1823.
- Rossetti, W. M. "Prefatory Notice." The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans.
New York: A. L. Burt, 18[?]. iii-xviii.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques. Emile. Trans. Barbara Foxley. New York: Everyman's
Library, 1955.
- Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus. Ed. M.K. Joseph. Oxford:
Oxford UP, 1969.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Eds. Roger
Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. Vol 6. New York: Gordian, 1965.
- Smellie, William. Smellie's Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery. 1756.
Ed. Alfred H. McClintock. Vols 1-3. London: New Sydenham Society, 1876.
- Smollett, Tobias George. "Review of Nihell's *Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*." The
Critical Review 9 (1760): 187-97 and 412.
- The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle. 1751. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1956.
2 vols.
- Sterne, Laurence. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. 1759-67.
Ed. Ian Campbell Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in The Works of Mary
Wollstonecraft. Eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. Vol 5. New York: New
York UP, 1989. 79-266.
- Wordsworth, William. The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and
Reception, Recent Critical Essays. Eds. M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill, Jonathan
Wordsworth. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Yearsley, Ann. An Elegy on Marie Antoinette of Austria, Ci-Devant Queen of France.

Bristol: Printed by J. Rudhall for the Author, and sold by the Author, at her

Library, Crescent, Hotwells, 1793.

----- Poems on Several Occasions. London: T. Cadell, 1785.

----- Poems on Various Subjects. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1787.

----- Stanzas of Woe Addressed from the Heart on a Bed of Illness to Levi Eames.
Esq., Late Mayor of the City of Bristol. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790.

----- The Rural Lyre: A Volume of Poems. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1796.

Secondary Materials

Arney, William Ray. Power and the Profession of Obstetrics. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

Behrendt, Stephen. "Anthologizing British Women Poets of the Romantic Period: The Scene Today." Critical Matrix 9.1 (1995): 95-105.

Bewell, Alan. "An Issue of Monstrous Desire: Frankenstein and Obstetrics." The Yale Journal of Criticism 2.1 (1988): 105-28.

Bindman, David. The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution. London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1989.

Boase, T.S.R. The Oxford History of English Art: English Art 1800-1870. Oxford: Clarendon, 1959.

Breen, Jennifer ed. Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An Anthology. London: Everyman's Library, 1992.

Brion, Marcel. Pompeii and Herculaneum: The Glory and the Grief. Trans. John Rosenberg. Toronto: Elek Books, 1960.

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

Cole, Lucinda and Richard G. Swartz. "'Why Should I Wish for Words?': Literacy, Articulation, and the Borders of Literary Culture." At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism. Eds. Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 143-69.

Colley, Linda. Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837. London: Pimlico, 1992. 237-81.

Collings, David. "The Monster and the Imaginary Mother: A Lacanian Reading of

- Frankenstein.*” Mary Shelley: Frankenstein. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford Books, 1992. 245-58.
- DeLacey, Maraget. “Puerperal Fever in Eighteenth-Century Britain.” Diseases of Pregnancy and Childbirth. Vol 5 of Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America 1600 to the Present. Ed. Philip K. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1996. 3-38. 5 vols.
- Davis-Floyd, Robbie E. “The Technocratic Model of Birth.” The Medicalization of Obstetrics: Personnel, Practice, and Instruments. Vol 2 of Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America 1600 to the Present. Ed. Philip K. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1996. 247-76. 5 vols.
- Donnison, Jean. Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women’s Rights. New York: Schocken, 1977.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- Elliot, Anthony. Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
- Epstein, Julia. “The Pregnant Imagination, Women’s Bodies, and Fetal Rights.” Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650-1865. Eds. Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash. Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1999. 111-37.
- Eubanks, Kevin. Family Memorials: Domestic Imagery in the Life and Death of Princess Charlotte Augusta. Dissertation for the University of Tennessee, 1996.
- Feldman, Paula ed. British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997.

- Ferguson, Moira. "Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley." The Eighteenth-Century 27.3 (1986): 247-68.
- Field, Corinne. "Breast-Feeding, Sexual Pleasure, and Women's Rights: Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication." Critical Matrix 9.2 (1995): 25-44.
- Fildes, Valerie A. Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel. "Power and Sex: An Interview with Michel Foucault." Trans. David J. Parent. Telos 32 (1977): 155.
- Gelpi, Barbara Charlesworth, "Significant Exposure: The Turn-of-the-Century Breast." Nineteenth-Century Contexts 20.2 (1997): 125-45.
- Harding, Anthony John. "Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman." Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices. Eds. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley. Hanover: UP of New England, 1995. 138-49.
- Holme, Thea. Prinny's Daughter: A Life of Princess Charlotte of Wales. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976.
- Homans, Margaret. Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
- Hunt, Lynn. "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of Femininity in the French Revolution." Eroticism and the Body Politic. Ed. Lynn Hunt. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1991. 108-30.
- Jacobus, Mary. "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution." First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis. New York: Routledge, 1995. 207-30.

Jordanova, L.J. "Gender, generation and science: William Hunter's obstetrical atlas."

William Hunter and the eighteenth-century medical world. Eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 385-412.

Knoepfmacher, U. C. "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters." The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel. Eds. George Levin and U. C. Knoepfmacher. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979. 88-119.

Kraus, Theodor. Pompeii and Herculaneum: The Living Cities of the Dead. Photographs By Leonard von Matt. Trans. Robert Erich Wolf. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973.

Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1986. 99-118.

Landes, Joan B. Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Landry, Donna. The Muses of Resistance: Labouring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain 1739-1796. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Laqueur, Thomas. "Organism, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology." The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century. Eds. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur. Berkeley: U of California, 1987. 1-41.

Lootens, Tricia. "Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine 'Internal Enemies,' and The Domestication of National Identity." PMLA 109.2 (1994): 238-53.

Mellor, Ann K. Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters. New York:

Routledge, 1988.

----- Romanticism & Gender. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Merchant, Carolyn. The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.

Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic." The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel. Eds. George Levin and U. C. Knoepfelmacher. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979. 77-87.

O'Dowd, Michael J. and Elliot E. Philipp. The History of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. New York: Parthenon, 1994.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy. Ed. Marilyn Pearsall. California: Wadsworth P, 1986. 62-74.

Penny, N. B. "English Church Monuments to Women who Died in Childbed Between 1780 and 1835." Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 38 (1975): 314-32.

Perry, Ruth. "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England." Journal of the History of Sexuality 2.2 (1991): 204-34.

Phelan, Peggy. Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Porter, Roy. "A touch of danger: The man-midwife as sexual predator." Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment. Eds. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 206-32.

----- English Society in the Eighteenth Century. Ed. J. H. Plumb. New York:

Penguin, 1990.

----- “ ‘The Secrets of Generation Display’d’: Aristotle’s Masterpiece in Eighteenth-Century England.” Eighteenth Century Life 9.3 (1985): 1-21.

Randel, Fred V. “*Frankenstein*, Feminism, and the Intertextuality of Mountains.” Studies in Romanticism 24 (1985): 515-32.

Richardson, Alan. “Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine.” Romanticism and Feminism. Ed. Anne K. Mellor. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. 13-25.

Ross, Marlon B. The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women’s Poetry. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Rubenstein, Marc A. “‘My Accursed Origin’: The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*.” Studies in Romanticism 15 (1976): 165-94.

Schiebinger, Londa. Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science. Boston: Beacon, 1993.

Schnorrenberg, Barbara Brandon. “Is Childbirth Any Place for a Woman?: The Decline of Midwifery in Eighteenth-Century England.” Midwifery Theory and Practice. Vol 1 of Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America 1600 to the Present. Ed. Philip K. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1996. 157-72. 5 vols.

Schor, Esther. “A Nation’s Sorrows, A People’s Tears: The Politics of Mourning Princess Charlotte.” Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1994. 196-229.

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 M. Shires. New York: Routledge, 1992. 31-51.

- Speert, Harold. Iconographia Gyniatrica: A Pictorial History of Gynecology and Obstetrics. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1973.
- Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977.
- Todd, Janet. Sensibility: An Introduction. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Viscomi, Joseph. Blake and the Idea of the Book. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Wertz, Dorothy C. "What Birth Has Done for Doctors: A Historical View." The Medicalization of Obstetrics. Vol 2 of Childbirth: Changing Ideas and Practices in Britain and America 1600 to the Present. Ed. Philip K. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1996. 3-20. 5 vols.
- Wilson, Philip K. "Out of Sight, Out of Mind?: The Daniel Turner – James Blondel Dispute Over the Power of the Maternal Imagination." Annals of Science 49 (1992): 63-85.
- Wolfson, Susan J. "'Domestic Affections' and 'the spear of Minerva': Felicia Hemans and the Dilemma of Gender." Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837. Eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994. 128-66.
- Yalom, Marilyn. A History of the Breast. New York: Ballantine, 1997.
- Youngquist, Paul. "*Frankenstein*: The Mother, the Daughter, and the Monster." Philological Quarterly 70.3 (1991): 339-59.
- Zerilli, Linda M. G. "Text/ Woman as Spectacle: Edmund Burke's 'French Revolution'." The Eighteenth Century 33.1 (1992): 47-72.

APPENDIX - Glossary

Accoucheur – French term for male birth attendant.

Analgesic – a substance injected, ingested or inhaled that reduces one's sense of pain.

Antiseptic – a substance that prevents the growth of microorganisms.

Barber-surgeon – male licensed to use surgical instruments. Before the eighteenth-century, he was frequently called in by midwives to extract a fetus in a difficult delivery. Surgeons received formal separation from the barbers in 1745.

Bacteria – one-celled microorganisms, some of which can cause infectious diseases.

Cervix – the neck of the uterus.

Colostrum – the first milk produced by a mammal after parturition.

Confinement – time period of labour and delivery.

Contraction – the thickening and shortening of the uterine muscle.

Craniotomy – destruction of the fetal head with a tool in order to facilitate delivery.

Crochet – obstetrical tool shaped like a hook.

Delivery – the process of childbirth, usually referring to the performance of the obstetrician or other medical attendant.

Emboitment theory – scientific view that all embryonic forms have existed since the beginning of time. Miniature forms of each species were embodied within the generative seed *ad infinitum*.

Embryo – developing offspring in-utero, within the first eight weeks.

Epidemic – the temporary, widespread prevalence of a disease.

Fetus – developing offspring within the uterus after two months of gestation.

Forceps – an instrument with two blades and handles, used to pull the fetus by the head to aid in a difficult delivery.

Galvanism – electricity applied to the body to stimulate muscles and nerves.

Gravid uterus – uterus with fetus inside.

Imaginationist – a person who believes that a mother's imagination can impress itself onto the fetus and affect its development.

Immunoglobulins – proteins that function as antibiotics.

Labour – process by which the uterus expels the fetus through the vaginal cavity. Refers to the work of the mother's body.

Lying-in hospital – medical establishment exclusively for the service of parturient women.

Man-midwife – male medical man who attended both normal and difficult deliveries, as differentiated from the barber-surgeon who only attended difficult labours. Term widely used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries.

Miasma – poisonous effluvia or germs polluting the air.

Milk fever – feverish attack occurring in mammals two to three days after parturition, particularly in women who are not breast-feeding.

Nomenclature – a system of names or terms found in a particular science or art.

Obstetrician – a physician who specializes in the care of pregnant women and childbirth. The term came into use in the 1820s and 30s.

Parturient – a woman in labour.

Parturition – the process of giving birth.

Pathogenic – capable of causing disease.

Pelvis – the basinlike cavity in the lower trunk of the body.

Placenta – an organ attached to the uterus and connected to the fetus by the umbilical cord, which provides for the nourishment of the fetus and for the elimination of its waste products. It is expelled from the uterus after the fetus is delivered.

Postpartum – occurring after the birth of the placenta. During eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, postpartum usually referred to up to a month after delivery.

Preformationist – a person who believes that beings preexist fully formed in the germ cell, and then grow from microscopic to normal proportions in the embryonic stage.

Puerperal fever – a bacterial infection occurring in women after childbirth.

Sepsis – local or generalized invasion of the body by pathogenic microorganisms.

Streptococcus – any of several types of spherical bacteria that cause diseases.

Teat – nipple found on all mammals, through which the milk ducts discharge on female mammals.

Uterus – hollow muscular organ found in female mammals, which is the developing place of the fetus. Its cavity opens into the vagina, and it is held in place by several ligaments.

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Dawn-Marie Zampa

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, Ontario

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1974

EDUCATION: General Amherst High School, Amherstburg
1988-1993

University of Windsor, Windsor
1993-1997 B.A.

University of Windsor, Windsor
1997-1999 M.A.