Wordsworth's "The Mad Mother": The Poetics and Politics of Identification

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In "Reading Idiocy: Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy," Joshua Gonsalves writes that Wordsworth recognizes some mothers' extreme love for their children which he incorporates into his own personality "as a mother-like vulnerability, unafraid of being feminized, demonized or condemned as effeminate, vulgar, or disgusting" (122). Gonsalves views "The Mad Mother" as preparatory for "The Idiot Boy," preceding it in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* to lower his "reader's defenses against mad mothers" and "enable a sympathetic identification with the extravagant mother he apotheosizes" in "The Idiot Boy" (126). I believe Wordsworth's maternal sympathy in "The Mad Mother" also helps explain his poetics and personality, particularly the poetic identification basic to his creative process and the evolution of his sexual politics.

The textual history of "The Mad Mother" reveals Wordsworth's own shifting sympathies and his commitment to the idea of "similitude in dissimilitude." Deserted by her husband and fearing the loss of her son, the mother, instead of sympathizing, projects her own wishes onto her son, creating an imbalance that the balladeer, a mediating figure, offsets in the poem. In the earliest editions (1798-1802), the balladeer identifies with the mother, a similitude comparable to the mother's over-identification with her child. However, in the edition of 1805, similitude and dissimilitude in the balladeer-mother relationship contrasts the over-identification he portrays in the mother-infant relationship. In the later editions (beginning in 1815), Wordsworth separates the balladeer and mother's voices until in 1836, the balladeer controls the mother's voice.

In the Preface, 1802, Wordsworth includes three ideas relevant to my discussion of "The Mad Mother": the importance of similarity and difference in identification, the pleasure people and poets derive from identification, and the basis for poetic identification in human sympathy. For Wordsworth poetic identification involves the poet's feelings of similarity with another person but also difference: the poet "bring[s] his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he described, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps" and lets "himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound[s] and identify[ies] his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure" (138). For Wordsworth imaginatively "modifying" the language enables him to separate from the original experience and create pleasure. "If the poet," Adela Pinch says, "must modify his reproductions of passions in order to make them pleasurable for the reader, it must be because the reader risks slipping into the same delusion" (838).

When Wordsworth explains the relationship between pleasure and identification in the context of meter in the Preface, he characterizes all psychological pleasure as that "which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings" (149). An imaginative act of sympathy countered with an awareness of difference brings pleasure.

One of the ways Wordsworth says that he will achieve the "purpose" of his poems, "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature," is "by tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings" in poems such as "The Mad Mother" (Preface 126). However, different editions of the poem reveal even more subtle "fluxes and refluxes" of the poet's mind. With the mother's voice he imagines the psychological and linguistic consequences of over-identification: psychosis and *semiosis*—a voice in which semiotic activity (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning) predominate. With the poem Wordsworth adapts the "case history" genre, as Alan Bewell explains, "for the observation, dramatic display, and interpretation of the workings of the imagination" (361).

At the center of "The Mad Mother" is the mother's identification with her child, which is the opposite of what Freudians consider to be normal. Klein and Chodorow, on the other hand, have characterized infants' experiences of their mothers as normal symbiotic mergers in which children have no sense of boundaries and that mothers, especially when breast-feeding, may temporarily lose their boundaries and psychologically merge with their children in intense moments of identification. However, Stern argues that in healthy encounters, mothers and children retain senses of self in moments of "being with" (*Interpersonal* 105). Consequently, if like the Mad Mother, they lose their boundaries, their awareness of their children as separate, then they have also lost their sense of reality and appear psychotic. For Kristeva (1980) all language includes a *semiotic* component (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning) rooted in the early relationship between mothers and children, expressed in the unintelligible utterances of psychotics, and comprises the rhythmic and tonal parts of poetic language which may disrupt meaning. Wordsworth's Mad Mother could be a case study for these theorists, yielding in-

sights into maternal sympathy, poetic identification, and gender politics.[1]

The identification of the Mad Mother and her child is in process, showing the "fluxes and refluxes of the mind" (Preface 126). At certain points, the mother recognizes her child's difference and she attends to the normal concerns of what Stern called primary relatedness, "attachment, security, and affection, the regulation of the baby's rhythms, the 'holding' of the baby, and the induction of and instruction in the basic rules of human relatedness that are carried out preverbally" (176). However, she is so closely bonded that she does not appear to distinguish external from internal reality, much like the over-identifying mothers that Chodorow describes. So long as she can retain the balance between similitude and dissimilitude, the identification is one of "being with," of also maintaining a feeling of difference. However, by the end of the poem, she loses her sense of external reality, refuses to accept separation from her child; and retreats into the wilderness. With this "experiment" (*Prose* 116), Wordsworth explores a mother's position and voice and suggests that without a balance of similitude in dissimilitude in a mother-child relationship, the result is extreme mental and linguistic instability.

After the balladeer's introduction to the poem, the mother's song opens with her recognition that some people say she is "'mad'" (11).[2] Wordsworth depicts the mother with her own uncertainty about her mental state. She is depressed and singing "'sad and doleful'" songs to overcome her depression. Moreover, she tells her son not to "'fear'" her and assures him that he is "'safe'" with her (15-20), separating the internal and external. However, in the next stanza Wordsworth depicts a blurring of internal and external reality. The mother recalls a deluded state in which three "'fiendish faces . . . Hung at [her] breast'" (23-24). When she sees her son, she shifts from the feelings of the "'fire'" and "'dull pain'" associated with these fiends to the "'sight of joy'" which does her "'good'" (21-2, 25-6). Initially, Wordsworth represents her as having a fantasy of being devoured by the "'fiends'" (perhaps being incorporated by her child), yet when she "'wake[s]'" from the dream-state, she relishes the actual son "'of flesh and blood'" (28). She does not fail to see him, in Klein's terms, as a "separate entity" and she must help the child become independent (300-01): "'he was here, and only he'" (30). Without some awareness of her son's separateness, he would become simply an extension of herself like the fiends she imagines.

In stanza four, the nursing babe gradually merges:

> "Suck, little babe, oh suck again!
> It cools my blood; it cools my brain;
> Thy lips I feel them, baby! they
> Draw from my heart the pain away.
> Oh! press me with thy little hand;
> It loosens something at my chest;
> About that tight and deadly band
> I feel thy little fingers press'd.
> The breeze I see is in the tree;
> It comes to cool my babe and me." (31-40)

As the mother and child materially connect, the physical and psychological boundaries collapse. She fragments the child into "'lips,'" "'hand,'" and "'fingers'" as she fragments herself into "'blood,'" "'brain,'" "'heart,'" and "'chest,'" alternating his parts and her parts from line to line and so mingling their parts together (31-8). Her blood cools as the baby drinks in her warm milk and the hand "'loosens something at'" her chest. The final two lines appear to be non sequitur, conveying the mother's blurring of her psychic state with her sense of reality: breast-feeding cools her, but she sees Nature's forces intentionally contributing to this cooling effect as well. She projects the cooling she experiences onto the natural scene.[3]

Coleridge comments perceptively on the significance of these two lines in *Biographia Literaria*, characterizing them as "so expressive of that deranged state, in which from the increased sensibility the sufferer's attention is abruptly drawn off by every trifle, and in the same instant plucked back again by the one despotic thought, and bringing home with it, by the blending, fusing power of Imagination and Passion, the alien object to which it had been so abruptly diverted, no longer an alien but an ally and an inmate" (2:150). The tree initially seems like a distraction that breaks the mother's intense connection with her child, but it is imaginatively fused with her original concern (cooling and connecting). She associates her cooling in breast-feeding with the breeze that she expressly says, "'comes to cool my babe and me.'" Even though she says the breeze cools "my babe and me," "fire" in the mother's "brain" and the child's "suck[ing]" that "cools [her] blood" imply that the mother equates her needs with her son's. Much like Chodorow's over-identifying mothers, she focuses purely on self-gratification (102).

Along with her self-involvement, this stanza also illustrates the extreme regularity of the meter and rhyme, the semiotic qualities, of most of her song. John E. Jordan called the overall pattern of the poem "monotonous" and speculated that Wordsworth thought that "the less varied form was more appropriate to the mania of the speaker" (177). Unlike the balladeer's stanza (which Wordsworth orders with iambic feet in four lines of tetrameter, followed by two sets of tetrameter-hexameter couplets, and concluding with two lines of tetrameter), Wordsworth composes the mother's nine-stanza song in ten-line stanzas of regular iambic tetrameter except for the last two lines of stanza ten. Moreover, he scores the rhyme scheme consistently (A A B B C D C D E E), perfectly rhyming each line with one other, except for two lines in stanza five. No other poem in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* is so regular. Wordsworth varies stanzas of other poems by altering the meter of a line, as in "Anecdote for Fathers," which he constructs in stanzas with three lines of tetrameter

and one line of hexameter. He also composes stanzas in which some end-words do not have a word with which to rhyme as in lines 1, 3, and 5 of "The Thorn" (*A* B *C* B *D* E F F E G G). He writes still other poems which include stanzas irregular in length as in "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" or which are written in blank verse as in "Tintern Abbey." The relentless musicality of the mother's song is a function of the over-identification Wordsworth depicts her as having with her child. The song's incantatory quality reflects the semiotic activity that Kristeva roots in the early mother-infant identification and "which introduces wandering or fuzziness into language" (136), aurally reinforcing the mother's disquieting story.

Wordsworth further represents the mother's identification with her child when she says "'love me, love me, little boy! / Thou art thy mother's only joy'" (41-42), rendering her experience with the "passionate excitement" and "lack of self-control" that Klein observes in real mothers who have lost their boundaries (301). While she experiences relief in the milk being loosened and "drawn" from her, she is not aware of the child's mutual satisfaction as the milk fills his stomach.

The identification in the fifth stanza takes the form of mutual dependence between mother and child for survival. Even as she appeals for his love, she threatens him with the prospect of her suicide and his death:

> "Oh! love me, love me, little boy!
> Thou art thy mother's only joy;
> And do not dread the waves below,
> When o'er the sea-rock's edge we go;
> The high crag cannot work me harm,
> Nor leaping torrents when they howl." (41-46)

The repetition of "love me, love me" stresses her longing for merger, and her threat to leap into the ocean implies a wish for mutual death. Yet her assertion that the "high crag" cannot hurt them again expresses a denial of external reality and a fantasy of unlimited power to beat the elements. The diction of line 46 is also telling with its *torrents* that *howl*, and Wordsworth calls attention to *howl* by breaking the rhyme scheme, using near rhyme instead of perfect rhyme with *soul* (48). While *torrents* may simply refer to rapidly flowing waters "leaping" from the ocean below her, *torrents* also denotes "a violent or tumultuous flow [. . .] of words, feelings" (*OED*). This definition implies another projection of the mother's emotional state onto nature, much more subtle than the cooling breeze. Indeed, *howl* continues this projection of her internal state onto nature, since, as the *OED* indicates, *to howl* is "to utter loud and doleful inarticulate cries; to wail, lament, esp[ecially] with pain." She hears in the waves, the sound of her own voice—a semiotic sound expressing intense feeling and pain.

She is saved by her child::

> "The babe I carry on my arm,
> He saves for me my precious soul;
> Then happy lie; for blest am I;
> Without me my sweet babe would die." (47-50)

Wordsworth abruptly shifts the mother's tone, a shift emphasized again by the break in the rhyme scheme and near rhyme between *howl* and *soul.* He saves her and her soul from the unpardonable sin of suicide. "'He saves for me my precious soul'"—but she also saves her son—"'Without me my sweet babe would die.'" Wordsworth depicts the mother's recognition of their mutual dependence in this moment of identification.

In stanza six the she identifies with her son by emphasizing his future singing ability, the ability through which she expresses herself in the song. She says, "'thou shalt sing / As merry as the birds in spring'" (59-60), and then in stanza nine she says, "'I'll teach him how the owlet sings'" (82). The abandoned mother has become a creature of nature herself, believing she has learned to sing like the creatures of nature. Like the semiotic bird-songs that have only tone and rhythm, will sing in a similar language, which, although beautiful, bears no meaning. .

In the next stanza, Wordsworth reveals that the father has deserted them, "'cares not for my breast'" (61) while her son's nursing "draws from [her] heart the pain away" (34). Her breast used to be "'fair to view'" (64), but now "'its hue'" has changed, her beauty "'flown'" and her "'cheek'" turned "'brown'" (65, 67). Bit she is pretty enough for her son: her breast "'Tis all thy own'" and "'fair enough for thee,'" so consequently, "'thou wilt live with me in love'" (63, 65-6). Here is her conflict: the father abandoned them when her pregnancy spoiled her beauty but she loves the babe because without him she would be alone.

But she is also conflicted about the father: "'If his sweet boy he could forsake, / With me he never would have stayed, '" (75-6) even as she prays "'For him that's gone and far away'" The absent father is the caused for her pain and solved it. In this complex poem, Wordsworth not only represents the mother's madness, but also her recognition of its sources. .

The mother's reference to her son as "'my little life'" in stanza eight expresses literally her over-identification with him (71). She identifies herself so closely with the son that *his life* becomes *my life.* However, the mother names herself and her son as "'we two'" (74, 79)., expressing her connection to and separation from her child at the same time. With this phrase, Wordsworth saves the mother from the over-identification, the "psychotic discourse" in which, according to Kristeva, semiotic activity engulfs the symbolic (133).

In stanza nine, the child stops nursing and breaks the physical bond with the mother. When his "'lips are still,'" and he has "'sucked [his] fill'" (81-4), she panics:

> "—Where art thou gone, my own dear child?
> What wicked looks are those I see?
> Alas! alas! that look so wild,
> It never, never came from me:
> If thou art mad, my pretty lad,
> Then I must be for ever sad." (85-90)

The mother's perspective shifts, a shift visually marked by the m-dash, from viewing her child as a "'lovely baby'" to a creature with "'wicked'" and "'wild looks'"; he has taken on the evil expressions of the "'fiendish faces'" whom the mother recalled in stanza two. This break dispels her fantasy of what F. H. Langman calls "a pastoral idyll harboring no enemy but winter and rough weather" (77). Instead of representing the dyad as the "'we two'" (74, 79) who will live together in an Indian bower, she distances herself far from the child with this new representation of possible madness—"'It [the madness] never, never came from me'"—and Wordsworth underscores that the madness (or "mad" physical behavior) came from her: either the child begins his identification with her by imitating the mother's facial expressions, or the mother projects her own madness onto her representation of the child.

After the mother acknowledges that if her child is mad, she "'must be forever sad'" (90), her tone radically shifts: "'Oh smile on me my little lamb! / For I thy own dear mother am'" (91-92). She frantically addresses her son and tries to make him acknowledge their union by begging him to smile. Even though the child has not deserted her as the husband did, regaining their bond becomes her passion. She reminds her son that her love has already "well been tried'" (93) In one sense *tried* conveys that she has proven her love: by seeking "'his father in the woods,'" saving him from the "'poisons of the shade,'" and finding him "'earth-nuts fit for food'" s (94-6). However, *tried* also suggests a test of patience: she has provided all that she can for the son (i.e., food and protection).and yet, when he is finished, he physically detaches to her even as she remains psychically bonded to him. As Langman notes, "the child is what enables her to retain her identity: its need holds her to responsibility, enables her to love, and therefore gives her the wish and the power to live and foster life" (73). Her identity is rooted in relation to another; if she is alone, her identity deteriorates and her voice fragments. Langman does not point out the danger of such a connection, that babies cannot provide what mothers need to shore up their identities.

Until these last two stanzas Wordsworth presents a mother on the verge of merging her identity with her son's. By song's end, she lapses completely into madness because she cannot cope with the child's physical separation from her and her perception of the possibility of another desertion. Her solution is to "'laugh and be gay, to the woods away'" (99), laughter because she cannot make meaning out of her situation. Through laughter, the mother conveys they can overcome the separation they experience and live blissfully together "'for aye'" (100). The glibness of Wordsworth's rhyme suggests the futility of such an option: in reality, mother and child cannot stay connected "'for aye.'"

Beyond evoking laughter as a semiotic activity, Wordsworth's shift in rhyme and meter also disrupts the regularity of the stanzas in the mother's song. He shifts from the regular, mesmerizing, iambic tetrameter of the song to one line of tetrameter with an iambic foot, two anapestic feet, and a final iambic foot, before returning to iambic tetrameter in the last line. This shift reinforces the semiotic component of laughter that the mother references. Wordsworth also includes internal rhymes of "'gay'" and "'away'" in the first line of the couplet and assonance with "'babe'" and "'aye'" in the final line quadrupling the long *a* sound and pushing the mother's language further into semiotic discourse. As the song ends, the mother's language drifts further into disorienting semiosis.

The uncertainty of the conclusion demonstrates what happens when a mother over-identifies with her child, when she loses a balance of dissimilitude with the similitude. The laughter, the added emphasis on sound at the expense of rational meaning, and the uncertainty about the mother and child's future when they retreat into the wilderness create an uncomfortable sense of boundlessness as the mother "slip[s] into an entire delusion" about her future with her son. At one level this uncertain conclusion offers a freedom to speculate about the mother and child's future, and type of pleasure that Gonsalves says "does not attempt to explain everything away" (128). At another level that freedom comes with a longing for authority, a longing for some meaning in a situation that seems hopeless. The mother's over-identification stimulates her imagination in unhealthy ways so that the empathy and concern that she claims to feel for her son becomes a distorted projection of her own fears.

While my analysis of the mad mother's psychological struggle to identify with her child shows the complexity of the mother's identification, Bewell notes that Wordsworth's hysterical women tell "as much about the anxieties and emotions of those who narrate them as they do about their subjects" (370). Wordsworth's revision of the poem over time depicts the balladeer's and Wordsworth's struggles to identify with the mother. In early versions, the balladeer appears to over-identify with the mother, and matches the mother's over-identification with her child. In the 1805 edition, Wordsworth balances the two voices and uses the narrator's voice to create a balance of similitude in dissimilitude. In 1815 and after, Wordsworth distances the mother's voice from the balladeer's voice over time and ultimately diminishes her voice. Aesthetically, Wordsworth's stabilizes the poem, but politically he contains a wild maternal voice.

In the opening stanza, the balladeer establishes the mother as a figure whom readers will find strange, but is similar enough that they may identify with her. He describes a woman whose "eyes are wild" and who has "burnt . . . coal-black hair" and "rusty-stain[ed]" eyebrows (1-3), when. she came "far from over the main" and is "alone" except for "a baby on her arm" (4-6). However , as alien, the balladeer places in a familiar rural setting speaking English:

> And underneath the hay-stack warm,
> And on the green-wood stone,
> She talked and sung the woods among;
> And it was in the English tongue. (7-10)

This familiarization balances the otherness with which the balladeer characterizes her in the opening: the first stanza thus establishes her as a figure of "similitude in dissimilitude."

Wordsworth himself comments on the significance of the woman's separateness and his choice of "the English tongue" as a means of identification. In response to John Kenyon's criticism of the phrase on September 24, 1836, he writes: "though she came from far, English was her native tongue—which shows her either to be of these Islands [Great Britain], or a North American. On the later supposition, while the distance removes her from us, the fact of her speaking our language brings us at once into closer sympathy with her" (*Later Years* 3:293). .[4]

In the second stanza, the balladeer adopts the mother's voice as his own, to lose his voice in her voice; however, at another level, Wordsworth displays the two voices as separate. The way he constructs the relationship between the balladeer who sings in the opening and the balladeer's singing of the mother's song suggests a strong difference between the voices. He initially represents two discrete characters speaking instead of one character singing the song of another by marking this separation in four ways.

First, by shifting from third-person pronouns in the first stanza to first-person pronouns in the remaining stanzas; Wordsworth switches from a voice of an observer to that of a participant. Second, Wordsworth changes the metrical pattern of stanza one (the balladeer's stanza) to a different pattern in the remaining nine stanzas (the mother's song). . The first stanza has four lines of tetrameter, is followed by two sets of tetrameter-hexameter couplets, and concludes with two lines of tetrameter. Wordsworth constructs the mother's nine-stanza song (except for the second to last line) with ten-line stanzas of iambic tetrameter to subtly distinguish between the characters. Stephen Bidlake observes a third way in the final four lines: "his tense change greatly increases the distance between his own speech and that of his speaker" (189). Fourth, along with shifts in case, meter, and tense, Wordsworth uses quotation marks to delineate the voice change at the beginning of stanza two, signaling the move from narrator to mother.

Even though Wordsworth meticulously marks the shift of voices from first to second stanza, by the end of the poem, in early editions, his narrator's voice merges with the mother's voice because he does not close her song with quotation marks. The mother's song appears to have overwhelmed the balladeer. Susan Wolfson observes that this lack of closing punctuation yields "a sense of its poet's inability to distance himself from the spell of the song that he rehearses. He may have so absorbed her voice and sensibility into his own that he can no longer contain and punctuate it as other" (46). Wordsworth destabilizes the balladeer's identity, and the mother's song subsumes it.

But why put so much stock in a pair of quotation marks? After all, in 1805, Wordsworth does close off the poem in *Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and other Poems* so that the absent quotation marks in previous editions may simply be an oversight. While this conclusion is possible, Wordsworth published two editions of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 and 1802, and with "The Mad Mother" in particular, he made subtle punctuation changes in both editions without adding the closing marks. In light of his meticulous editing and the fact that he published two new editions before adding the quotation marks, I believe he used the unorthodox punctuation as part of an experiment with poetic identification that he enacts in the mother's song.[5]

In texts from and after 1805, Wordsworth marks the distinction between balladeer and mother more insistently. For example, he altered the title of the poem after 1805. In editions of the poem from 1815-1827 and in 1832 he omits the title completely, diminishing the presence of the mother by removing her name from the title. He adds the title "Her Eyes are Wild" in *Selections from the Poems of William Wordsworth* in 1831 and in all editions in and after 1836. Furthermore, in the 1836 *Poetical Works*, he adds stanza numbers which conventionally mark the words on the page as a poem and remind readers that they are reading the mother's song as the narrator has told it. In light of the progressive separation between balladeer and mother that Wordsworth imposes as he revises, the earlier editions represent a more experimental Wordsworth willing to construct his balladeer as directly identifying with a mother, to display his poetic identification in action, and to cross a border without returning. The mediating figure (the balladeer) whom Wordsworth constructs to stand between a reality (the mother's singing of her song) and a representation of reality (the balladeer replaying her song) is engulfed, which leaves the poem open-ended. The punctuation problem and the balladeer's inability to separate his voice from the mother's in early editions parallel the mother's fantasy of escape into the wilderness and denial of separation from her son at the end of the song section. This parallel correlates the poem frame and content. In all versions the mother confuses the fantasy and reality; dismisses

the danger of being abandoned and alone, and chooses to "laugh and be gay." The later revisions represent a Wordsworth still exploring extreme identification but who stabilizes the frame of that experiment by stressing the difference between the mother and balladeer. Aesthetically he creates a greater feeling of dissimilitude and comfort even though politically he gradually contains an unruly female voice.

As is often the case with Wordsworth's poetry, the edition one chooses may lead to very different interpretations of his work. If one reads early editions of "The Mad Mother," then the balladeer's identification with the mother reflects the identification between mother and child. From a feminist perspective, this edition becomes a more politically progressive poem, especially in contrast to the greater disciplining of the mother's voice in the 1836 edition. From a biographical perspective one might interpret the earliest edition as a guilty identification with Annette Vallon whom Wordsworth deserted in France with their daughter Caroline in 1792, or a projection of his desire to maintain a permanent bond with his mother Ann who died in 1778 when he nearly eight years old. The 1805 edition becomes valuable from an aesthetic perspective because it embodies Wordsworth's concept of poetic identification in the Preface of 1802. Closing the mother's song with quotation marks, he also encloses the her voice, separating hers from the balladeer's, who acquires control and avoids slipping into her "delusion.". The 1836 edition is also valuable from a rhetorical perspective. Wordsworth emphasizes the balladeer's separation from the mother by adding stanza numbers that interrupt the display of her intense over-identification with the child. As a result, readers' sympathy for the mother may be enhanced because Wordsworth's linguistic modifications prevent them from "slipping into the same delusion" (Pinch 838).

Raymond Carney offers an insight on Wordsworth's revisions of "The Ruined Cottage" that applies to his revisions of "The Mad Mother": "what distinguishes Wordsworth as an author from Robert and Margaret as victims is his authorial power—just what they lack—his capacity to measure, discipline, and control his relation to events that threaten to overcome him" (640-41). By having the mother "slip into an entire delusion," Wordsworth displays the mother's lack of control to show the psychological and linguistic effects of over-identification—psychosis and semiosis—but he appears to lose control of his own poetic voice by leaving out the closing quotation marks. As Wordsworth revises "The Mad Mother" into "Her Eyes Are Wild," his increasing "capacity to measure, discipline, and control" enables him to display and harness the mother's powerful voice. He can show the compelling linguistic and psychological effects of over-identification by creating the mother's first-person account of her plight, but he can contain that voice with a restrained, and mentally balanced narrator.

Aesthetically, Wordsworth limits the similitude and increases the dissimilitude as he revises the poem over time and strives to improve it. Politically, he limits and controls maternal voices as he revises his work. For example, in 1805, Wordsworth predicates poetic power on a child's relationship with the mother in the blessed babe scene in book 2 *The Prelude*; however, by 1850, he objectifies the mother and emphasizes the significance of the child's relationship with personified nature for poetic power (Hale 145). Furthermore, in his discussion of the purpose of his poems in the Preface in 1836 he deletes material on "maternal passion" and references to poems with mothers as central figures—"The Mad Mother," "The Idiot Boy" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman"—and instead focuses on a general principle of the importance of action, situation, and feeling in his poetry (126-27).

NOTES

[1]Klein was probably the first clinician to examine the mother-infant relationship from the mother's perspective. In "Love, Guilt and Reparation," she examines the dyad in terms of identification and says that after the infant is born, the mother is "capable of putting herself in the child's place and of looking at the situation from his point of view" (318). In *The Reproduction of Mothering* Chodorow's comments on a number of mothers with extreme, sometimes pathological, over-identifications and the effects their behaviors have on children (100-2). Daniel Stern expands the significance of a natural, healthy identificatory phase between mothers and children and characterizes the phase as one of four themes in the psychic organization he calls the *motherhood constellation* "the dominant organizing axis for the mother's psychic life" (*Motherhood* 171). In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva associates the *semiotic* component of language (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning) with the mother, and following Jacques Lacan, she contrasts it with the *symbolic* component (the signifying, lexical, morphological, metaphorical) with which she associates the father. Kristeva locates the semiotic in infants' first echolalias as nonsensical rhythms and intonations that precede the symbolic "phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences."

[2]I use quotation-within-quotations marks when citing the mother's words to signal the narrator's adoption of her voice even though this format is only completely accurate for texts from 1805 and after.

[3]Averill discusses Wordsworth's awareness of eighteenth-century psychological theory and shows how "details in some of the poems . . . reflect Wordsworth's reading of [Erasmus] Darwin's chapter [in *Zoonomia*] on 'Diseases of Increased Volition.'" Darwin advises that, "'in cases of acute puerperal depression, 'the child should be brought frequently to the mother, and applied to her breast, if she will suffer it, and this whether she at first attends to it or not. As by a few trials it frequently excites the storgè, or maternal affection and removes the insanity' (*Zoonomia* 2.360)." Averill remarks that the mad mother is "relieved by nursing her child" (156).

[4]The emphasis on "English" points to a plausible psycho-biographical interpretation of the poem expressing Wordsworth's guilt for deserting his mistress Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline in France in 1792. England's declaration of war on France in 1793 prevented him from seeing them until the Treaty of Amiens allowed him to visit them in Calais in 1802. Within this psycho-biographical framework, he depicts himself as the deserting husband, Annette as the mad mother, and Caroline as the poor infant. Wordsworth also becomes the balladeer who attempts to make sense out of this situation. The greater separation between the balladeer and the mother expresses Wordsworth's greater control of the trauma after the meeting. The emphasis on the woman's "English tongue" becomes particularly defensive in this context.

[5]Quotation marks are problematic in the textual history of the poem. Apparently, de Selincourt added quotations marks to the beginning of each stanza in his edition of Wordsworth's poems. In personal correspondence, James Butler writes, "I believe that there is not a lifetime state with the quotation marks before the first word of each of stanzas 2-10. The implication would then be that de Selincourt changed the punctuation—as he frequently did." Hayden also includes quotation marks for each stanza in his Penguin edition of Wordsworth's *Poems*. The absent closing quotation marks create a blurring between the balladeer and mother that has caused critics such as Langman to consider the poem as having only one voice (the mother's) and to slight the significance of the narrator (72).

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Vying for "Brilliant Landscapes": Claude Mirrors, Wordsworth, and Poetic Vision

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In a chaise particularly the exhibitions of the convex-mirror are amusing. We are rapidly carried from one object to another. A succession of high-coloured pictures is continually gliding before the eye. They are like the visions of the imagination; or the brilliant landscapes of a dream. (Gilpin, *Forest Scenery* 3.225)

Rooted in theories of the picturesque and in a conception of nature as defective, the Claude mirror idealized, or de-naturalized, the natural.[1] Such idealization foregrounds a tautological understanding of nature itself: a scene was "natural insofar as it resembled a landscape already governed by aesthetic rule" (Galperin 19). The Claude mirror perpetuated this tautology by privileging the represented (or reflected)