



Wordsworth's prescient baby: Conceptions of the mother-infant relationship in the development of the Self 1790s-1890s

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Abstract

This article explores views of the mother-infant relationship and how it reveals conceptions of the self in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. William Wordsworth's theory of the development of the self and mind in infancy in his 1799 *Prelude* (published 1850) is very much ahead of its time, anticipating twentieth century psychoanalytic and attachment relations theories. Through a thorough investigation of baby diaries and childcare advice literature during the two centuries, my findings indicate that it was only until the 1830s that two other writers' ideas about infancy and the self began to resemble Wordsworth's. I have identified three general trends in thinking during my period of investigation: before the 1830s, maternal attention was generally considered to be important to the development of the infant, but her importance did not go far beyond ensuring the physical well-being of her offspring. By the 1830s, advances in science as well as increasing evangelisation demanded the mother play a greater role in the spiritual and moral development of her children. By the 1870s, with Darwin's theory of evolution and the formalised scientific study of infancy, understandings of the development of the infant focused on the biological and evolutionary rather than the internal and subjective.

To cite as

Halton-Hernandez, E., 2014, 'Wordsworth's prescient baby: Conceptions of the mother-infant relationship in the development of the Self 1790s-1890s', *PsyArt* **18**, pp. 97–118.

This article will explore late eighteenth and nineteenth century views of the mother-infant¹ relationship and how they reveal conceptions of the self. I will investigate historical changes in the understanding of infantile development,

¹ The term 'infant' is taken here to mean the age before talking. The word infant comes from 'infans' which means speechless. Typically the period between 0 and 12 months old.

primarily through British baby diaries and childcare advice literature. In two cases I will look at French authors whose work was translated into English and widely read by an Anglophone audience.² First I will consider William Wordsworth's model of infantile development in his 1799 poem *The Prelude* and briefly look at Locke and David Hartley's theories of the intellectual development of the mind. I will then consider the prevailing ideas from childcare literature and baby diaries from the late eighteenth century until the 1820s. Next I will explore the changing conceptions of the mother-infant relationship in the childcare advice boom of the 1830s. Finally, I will survey the Child Study Movement's different approach towards infantile development at the end of the 1800s.

My central argument will be that by the 1830s the mother-infant relationship was considered emotionally formative, with most people considering the love of the mother as vital to the development and formation of the self. However this self was a moral self, whereas Wordsworth and two lesser known thinkers in the 1830s were unusually prescient in their understanding of the importance of very early emotional experiences in the growth of intellect and imaginative life.

I have chosen to focus on the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the following reasons. In 1799, the Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) finished his first version of *The Two-Part Prelude*, eventually published in 1850 as *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem*. In Book Two of the poem Wordsworth describes a baby's early encounters with his mother and the natural world, producing a highly original and sophisticated model of an infant's mind and its mental development. As I will elaborate further in the next chapter, Wordsworth took a conjectural leap into the twentieth century with regards to his understanding of the mother-infant relationship and its influence on the development of the emergent self. For this reason I want to investigate Wordsworth's foresight in relation to his contemporaries and later generations.

It is therefore important to provide an overview of the historical conceptions of the mind and self that influenced Wordsworth's generation and those to follow. Many ideas of childhood and selfhood in the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries continued to provide a foundation for the writers of baby diaries and childcare books in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

² For more baby diarists from the rest of Europe and the United States in this period, see Doris Wallace, Margery Franklin & Robert Keegan, 'The Observing Eye: A Century of Baby Diaries', *Human Development*, eds. A.L. Dean, 37, (January 1994), p.1-94. For information on child care advice writers from the USA in 1830, see Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Childcare advice from John Locke to Gina Ford*, Frances Lincoln Publishing, (1983) p.92-94. Hardyment also points out that American childcare advice books were much less widely read in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century which is why I have chosen not to look at them.

The intellectual legacy of Locke and Hartley

John Locke (1631-1704) was hugely influential in his conception of the self and its development from the seventeenth century onwards. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Locke proposed the new-borns mind to be like ‘white paper, void of all characters, without ideas.’ (Side, 2006) By rejecting the existence of innate ideas, man’s mind was therefore ‘furnished’ through experience. (Coveney, 1957) The idea that we entered the world as ‘Tabula Rasa’ or ‘blank slates’ meant that the infant was shaped by external conditions alone. (Seigel 2005) The rejection of ideas such as original sin or any inherent moral qualities meant the experiences of the infant were of primary importance to the formation of the self. Early childhood came to be recognised as an important period for the creation of the later adult.

Another philosopher, David Hartley (1705-1757) expanded on Locke’s theories of ‘tabula rasa’ and assimilation of experience in his doctrine of associations. According to Associationism experience is accumulated through sensual perception of external objects. This meant all ideas, feelings and passions have their origins in experience of the external world. Furthermore Hartley believed that affect had its origins in ideas, so emotion follows secondarily from cognitive processes. (Beatty, 1922)

By the time he was writing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth had dismissed such an empiricist view of the mind as ‘murder to dissect’, when ‘each most obvious and particular thought... hath no beginning.’ (Wordsworth, 1799) As we shall see in relation to mental development, Wordsworth rejected the belief that the inner world was made up of neat moments of traceable external experience. As the psychoanalyst Ron Britton notes, both Wordsworth and fellow poet Samuel Coleridge came to feel ‘that the empirical school of philosophy, with its assembly of a filing cabinet of sensory experiences as a picture of the mind, annihilated man’s sense of himself.’ (Britton, 1998: 135) We shall see that Wordsworth, unlike Locke and Hartley had the notion of a dynamic internal world in infancy and adulthood rooted in interpersonal relations.

Wordsworth’s model of the development of the Self in infancy

I will spend some time elaborating on Wordsworth’s model as it is central to my later findings. Known now as the ‘Infant Babe Passage’, Wordsworth opens with the lines ‘Blessed the infant babe/For with my best conjectures I would trace/ The progress of our being’ (Prelude line 267-270) [For the full passage see Appendix 1]. From here onwards Wordsworth gives an account of infantile experience in subjective terms. The passage describes a model of mental development, beginning with a description of the infant’s attachment to the mother, the extension of this attachment to the external world, and the infant’s founding of an internal world. I have chosen to look at the 1799 version

of the poem as opposed to the more widely known 1805 edition because of its more detailed examination of mental development.

Wordsworth firstly describes how the mother-infant relationship is necessarily formative and natural to the development of the self. ‘Upon his mother’s breast’ the infant ‘who, when his soul/ Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,/ Doth gather passion from his mother’s eye.’ (271-273). From birth Wordsworth suggests the infant is biologically driven to seek a loving relationship with its mother or primary caregiver. The infant absorbs or internalises the mother’s loving feelings, which become a source of comfort and strength in the infant’s own mind: ‘Such feelings pass into his torpid life/ Like an awakening breeze’ (274-275). These experiences inspire the infant’s enthusiasm for the outside world. (Britton, 1998: 137)

The qualities of the loving mother then suffuse all external objects where ‘From this beloved presence- there exists/ A virtue which irradiates and exalts/ All objects through all intercourse of sense’ (288-290). Therefore, the infant begins to cultivate a bond with the external world: ‘Along his infant veins are interfused/ The gravitation and the filial bond/ Of Nature that connect him with the world’ (292-294). Here we are told the infant begins to gain a sense of living inside a world that is a part of him and of which he is also a part. (Britton, 1998: 137)

In such an auspicious environment the infant’s mind expands:

*Thus day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.* (280-284)

Wordsworth states that the capacity to love invigorates and fuels the capacity to think. This is in direct opposition to Hartley’s understanding that cognition precedes feeling. In *Observations on Man* (1749) Hartley claims ‘Our passions or affections can be no more than aggregates of simple ideas united by association.’ (Hartley, 1749: 368) Significantly Hartley does not recognise the mother or primary carers love as the essential precursor of intellect or the essential foundation for a sense of self.

Britton has pointed out Wordsworth’s remarkable prescience in his understanding of infantile development. He argues that for Wordsworth ‘no eighteenth century philosophical theory is adequate for his purposes’. (Britton, 1998: 135) Instead he shares much more in common with twentieth century ‘psychoanalytic writers such as Klein (1952), Balint (1952) and Winnicott (1945) [who] sought explanations for adult psychological developments in early infancy’. (Britton, 1998: 134)

Indeed Wordsworth implicitly echoes Melanie Klein's ideas of projection and introjections explained in her essay 'Some Theoretical Conclusions regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant' (1952). By projection, Klein means the attributive projection of one's internal world onto external objects. Introjection describes the process of internalising the qualities of the external object into the internal world. The infant: 'From Nature largely he receives, nor so/ Is satisfied, but largely gives again;/ For feeling has to him imparted strength.' (297-299). So the baby, allowed to feel freely then animates the external world with significance and meaning.

Through repeatedly projecting and introjecting, the infant creates an external world of significance and an internal world of substance. (Britton, 1998: 137) The infant 'Creates, creator and receiver both' (303). The mother's first tender feelings are therefore crucial to healthy development. Wordsworth's theoretical model makes the claim that infants who are able to engage with nature and their internal world display a particular capacity for imagination and creativity. 'Such, verily,' thinks Wordsworth, 'is the first/ Poetic spirit of our human life' (305-306).

The importance of 'the discipline of love' in Wordsworth's ideas also resemble those of many twentieth century child psychologists and attachment theorists.³ In *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) Bowlby writes that 'Mother-love in infancy is as important for mental health as are proteins and vitamins for physical health....what occurs in the earliest months and years of life can have deep and long-lasting effects.' (Hardyment, 1983: 236) His findings on the adverse impact of maternal deprivation sadly resonate with Wordsworth's own experiences. In Book Five of *The Prelude*: 'Early died/ My honoured mother, she who was the heart/ And hinge of all our learnings and our loves;/ She left us destitute, and as we might/ Trooping together' (Book V 256-260). (Wordsworth et al, 1979: 164) But with proper maternal care, the infant is 'No outcast he, bewildered and depressed'. (291) In Wordsworth's earlier poem, 'The Mad Mother' (*Lyrical Ballads* 1798) he skilfully imagines the destructive relationship between a deranged mother and her child.

Wordsworth's assertion of a subjective self forged during infancy is also iterated in Daniel Stern's *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (1985). Stern observes that 'during the first two months the infant is actively forming a sense of an emergent self' and 'pervasive feelings of interconnectedness and interpersonal well-being do occur from this period from two to seven months, these feelings serve as an emotional reservoir of human connectedness.' (Stern, 1998: 241)

³ See also: Colwyn Trevarthen 'Descriptive analyses of infant communication behaviour' in H.R. Shaffer (ed.), *Studies in mother-infant interaction: The Lockh Lomond Symposium*, pp. 221-270, London (1977)

Nowadays we are so accustomed to accepting the formative nature of the mother-child relationship, that it seems obvious that the baby is ‘Subjected to the discipline of love’. It is in the light of Wordsworth’s remarkable insights that I want to investigate baby diaries and childcare literature to see how typical his understanding was. Jonathan Wordsworth, academic and descendent of the poet claims ‘Wordsworth the infant psychologist is surely 100 years ahead of time’. (Wordsworth, 1982: 78) I will show in the next chapter that Wordsworth did indeed demonstrate incredible foresight, but by the 1830s some ideas began to emerge independently that to some extent shared a common conceptual world.

1790s-1820s The Age of Reason and Practicality

During this period, the child rearing theories of Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were the most popular and pervasive of all pedagogical advice. Rousseau’s novel *Émile, or On Education* (1763) has been heralded as the most widely read child-rearing manual of its age, distinct from the many medical handbooks that were in frequent circulation during the eighteenth century. (Hardyment, 1983) The novel continued to inform parents on how to rear and educate their offspring well into the nineteenth century. Though *Émile* was not written as a detailed handbook on parenting, we shall see that Rousseau’s views of the mother’s duties were nonetheless influential.

In *Émile*, Rousseau stressed the importance of ‘quality’ maternal care during early infancy. In his discussion of breastfeeding in Book One he recognised the bond that develops between mother and infant if she undertakes breastfeeding herself. (Hardyment, 1983) The mother who breastfeeds was less likely to neglect or harm the baby, as opposed to a disinterested wet nurse: ‘the infant, who is ill attended, will have time enough to perish, before his nurse can behold him with the fondness of a parent.’ (Rousseau, 1763: 17) In her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), Mary Wollstonecraft discussed Locke and Rousseau’s child care advice. Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft stressed the maternal bond that would develop from breastfeeding- ‘The suckling of a child also excited the warmest glow of tenderness- Its dependant, helpless state produces an affection, which may properly be termed maternal...arises quite as much from habit as instinct’. (Wollstonecraft, 1787: 4) However, inspiring the infant’s tenderness in addition to the mothers through suckling is neither acknowledged nor explored in either Rousseau or Wollstonecraft’s works.

Thinkers of the period were instead preoccupied with the mother’s role in ensuring the infant’s physical well-being. The poet and physician Hugh Downman’s popular poem ‘*Infancy or the management of children: a didactic poem in six books*’ (first published 1774, in its seventh edition by 1809) stressed the safeguarding of the infant’s health as the most important responsibility. He wrote ‘Health is the greatest blessing man receives from

bounteous Heaven’ and on ‘the management of these first years depends the future man.’ (Downman, 1803: 1)

Though in poetic form, the poem contains advice on the management of children rather than anything resembling the detailed philosophical and psychological model offered in *The Prelude*. In striking contrast to Wordsworth, Downman implores the mother to observe her child’s biological growth, the infant’s mind developing independently from her physical ministrations:

*With me then turn thy sight
On the prime Infant-state of helpless Man:
On the first dawn of life, when Nature now
Ushers her tender offspring into day;
Observe the young ideas how they wake
In gradual order, till at length matured
By time, they speak a living soul within.* (Downman, 1803: 3)

With Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, Downman extols the benefits of breastfeeding and maternal bonding in the service of physical wellbeing:

*Know the first efflux from the milky fount
Is Nature's chymic mixture, which no power
Of Art presumptuous can supply; this flows
Gently deterrent, purifying, bland;
This each impediment o'ercomes, and gives
The young, unfetter'd springs of life to play* (Downman, 1803: 7)

As we have seen, Wordsworth believed that a mother’s love for her child did more than just predispose the mother to bond with her infant, thereby ensuring its survival. The mother’s love would contribute to the child’s emotional and spiritual development and be the basis of its developing self, something that neither Rousseau nor his contemporaries discussed. Indeed, Rousseau imagined the prototype *Émile* as an orphan.

A rare exception to these general ideas was George Armstrong’s *Account of the Diseases most Incident to Children* (1767). Echoing modern attachment theory, he recognised that ‘If you take a sick Child from its Parent or Nurse, you break its Heart immediately.’ (Armstrong, 1767: 1) Although he did not expand on this understanding of maternal deprivation to form a theory of development of the self, nonetheless these thoughts were exceptional for the period.

The emphasis on survival is understandable when considering the high rate of infant mortality. The eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw nearly half of all babies die before they reached their fifth birthday, the majority before their first. (Hardyment, 1983) Indeed many of the diarists such as Sara

Coleridge and Charles Darwin experienced the loss of a young child. Much focus was therefore given to the physical and practical concerns of bringing up children- their clothing, nutrition and health, instead of looking at psychological and emotional factors. Michael Underwood's *Treatise on the Diseases of Children* (1789) was specifically concerned with helping mothers identify and treat the various illnesses their child might suffer. More generalised manuals on a mother's practical duties included William Buchan's *Offices and Duties of a Mother* (1800) and his later *Advice to Mothers* (1803). (Hardyment, 1983) Josiah Wedgwood II's baby diary entitled 'Hints on the Management of the Children' (1797-1799), also centres on the practical concerns of cleanliness and physical wellbeing.

Hardyment reasons that such high mortality rates led to a mood of resignation. (Hardyment, 1983) Indeed, becoming a mother during this period entailed a much greater risk of death and loss than it does today or even later in the nineteenth century. When a parent's primary concern was keeping themselves and their child alive, inevitably less attention was paid to observing or even thinking about emotional and psychological needs. Baby diarists of this period such as Catherine Stanley and Josiah Wedgewood were fortunate as their upper-class lifestyles provided them with additional child support, from maids and servants to necessary medical care. However neither diarist shows awareness of the effect of the mother on the psychological wellbeing on the infant, reflecting an absence of these concerns in the public's mind. The fear of losing a child in infancy must have had a profound effect on how far mothers could allow themselves to get attached to their babies and recognise the central value of their role.

Catherine Stanley (1792-1862) of Alderley, Cheshire began her diary in 1812 when her first child Owen was nine months old. In the preface Stanley quotes lines from Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid: 'If we could obtain a distinct and full history of all that hath passed in the mind of a child from the beginning of life... would probably give more light into the human faculties, than all the systems of philosophies.' (Stanley, 1812: 1) Stanley clearly felt recording her observations would facilitate a better understanding of their natures and characters. Rousseau's influence is also evident in Stanley's copying of large excerpts from his novel, 'La Nouvelle Heloise'. (Stanley, 1812: 1)

However she lacks any awareness of the mother-infant bond or the critical nature of her own involvement as emotionally formative. She leaves both Owen and her youngest daughter Mary, aged 7 months for six weeks between July and September 1813, but does not contemplate the effect this may have on them. On her return on September 12th 1813 she writes: 'Mary did not know me and was frightened the first day' but adds that 'she can raise herself on her feet from the floor by pulling a chair- she weighed Sept. 19th 15 lb.' (Stanley, 1812: 17)

Unlike some sources from the 1830s, Stanley reflects little on her relationship to Owen and Mary. Instead she muses upon her role as educator and moulder of character and is keen to instil qualities and virtues through training. In April 1818 she writes ‘How difficult it is to guide a child enough & not too much in point of feeling...you run the risk of creating an artificial character’(Stanley, 1812: 79) She also complains of Owen’s character as wanting ‘the higher principles & feelings to be instilled-for he is habitually selfish & finds so many interests in everything around him that he has none to bestow on other things...This is a deficiency wh. must be remedied.’ (Stanley, 1812: 52)

Stanley’s notions perfectly echo those of Locke. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) Locke writes that parent’s have considerable responsibility to ensure their children are reared correctly through the formation of healthy habits. By wearing light clothing, taking cold baths, minimal coddling and uncertain meal times the right sort of character could be cultivated. On the other hand, Rousseau idealised the notion of the feral child unchained from the shackles of society and believed the child should develop free from burdensome adult intervention. (Pollock, 1983) However in spite of their opposing views, both thinkers felt good behaviour was established by carrot and stick methods and that even small babies could learn to associate certain actions with inevitable consequences. (Hardyment, 1983: 18) Stanley attempts this with Mary in 1814: ‘I began Mary’s education yesterday by refusing her some potatoes till she shook her head when I told her. She was obstinate & wd. no-do it & gave her none- today she shook her head the moment I told her’. (Stanley, 1812: 27)

Josiah Wedgwood II (1769-1843) of Cressely, Pembrokeshire began his baby journal in 1797 tailing off by October 1799. (Wedgwood, 1797: 1) His four children, Elizabeth (1793), Josiah (1795), Marianne who died early and Charlotte (1797) are all carefully observed. Wedgwood was in his late 20s and had the leisure to record his concerns. Gwen Raverat, a descendent of the Wedgwood-Darwin family writes that he was ‘undoubtedly influenced by more advanced ideas of his day’ on childcare, quoting Rousseau and novelist/philosopher William Godwin. (Wedgwood, 1797: 1) Wedgwood was also a friend of poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was known for his advanced radical ideas.

Wedgwood’s diary, ‘Hints on the management of the children’ as the title suggests reads more like an advice manual than a reflection on parenting or a father’s relationship with his children. He opens with instruction on how to treat a child in pain and later advises on cleanliness and nutrition. (Wedgwood, 1797: 1) The children’s mother is barely mentioned- instead Josiah is preoccupied with the servants influence on the children’s characters. Throughout he expresses the Lockean concern for the children’s forming of ‘habits’. He worries about them picking up bad practices from adults writing that ‘All actions hurtful to the child himself will be discovered to see 10 [times]

by their consequences'. (Wedgwood, 1797: 19) Wedgwood was certainly more engaged in the welfare of his children than was typical of other fathers who from necessary employment or disinterest were not involved in family life. 'There cannot have been many gentleman of that time' writes Gwen Raverat, 'who actually put their three year old sons to bed every night'. (Wedgwood, 1797: 1) But Wedgwood does not consider the importance of either parent as a source of emotional care and stability.

The preoccupation with the formation of habit and good behaviour in Wedgwood and Stanley demonstrates the pervasive influence of associationist theories. Stanley reasons that Owen's many phobias 'must proceed from some accidental association of fancy in his mind wh[ich] it is impossible to trace-sometimes it evidently proceeds from his seeing or hearing an effect without understanding the cause.' (Stanley, 1812: 5) The sense that habits and ideas are formed out of providing the appropriate environment for associations ignored the importance of internal mental processes and the realm of the imagination that Wordsworth privileged in his theory of mind.

In the next section I will look at the 1830s. Some of the aforementioned ideas still held ground, but there is a greater focus on the mother-infant relationship as the crucial determinant in the structuring of the self and character.

1790s-1820s The Age of Reason and Practicality

As we have seen at the turn of the nineteenth century, parents had to rely on a narrow scope of literature for childcare advice, either by those with a philosophical preoccupation or medical focus. By the 1830s there was a huge increase in the publication and consumption of childcare literature.⁴ Baby-care books were no longer a spin-off from medical manuals concerned with infant mortality and advice shifted to a focus on moral and spiritual welfare. (Hardyment, 1983: 36) I shall try to show how maternal care was now being understood to shape the infant and how some of the ideas that evolved resembled Wordsworth's but viewed through a moral lens.

Around the late 1820s and 1830s, many childcare manuals came to be written by women, often by those who were mothers themselves. Melesina Trench reflected on her own experiences as a mother to inform the advice she gave in *Thoughts of a parent on education* (1837). When publications such as *Mother's Magazine*, *Parent's Assistant* and *The Family Magazine* came on the

⁴ For more British childcare advice books that focused on the physical and practical rearing of infants/children see: Thomas Bull, *Hints to Mothers* (1837), Isaac Taylor, *Home Education* (1838), Pye Henry Chavasse, *Advice to Mothers* (1839), Samuel Smiles, *Physical education, or the nurture and management of children* (1838), William Cobbett, *Advice to Young men ... on how to be a Father* (1829), Louisa Mary Barwell, *Nursery Government* (1836) Note the greater number of male writers concerned with practical and physical matters.

market they were very popular amongst middle and upper class families. (Hardyment, 1983: 19) This was a significant change from the male dominated literature of the eighteenth century with its close connections to the philosophical and medical professions. By the 1830s child rearing literature became a popular and respected field in its own right.

How do we account for this emergent boom in the 1830s? Advances in printing, literacy and in the sciences and lower mortality rates were important. Hardyment also points to the new wave of evangelism in Victorian society which made child-rearing a moral task of ‘continual nourishing and pruning, staking up and cutting back.’ (Hardyment, 1983: 19) With increased religious and moral responsibilities, the role of the mother as ‘primary’ carer came to be seen as increasingly important. William Cadogan’s simple belief in the 1750s that once feeding was established ‘there seems nothing left... to do but keep the child clean and sweet’ (Cadogan, 1748: 104) was no longer sufficient by the 1830s. (Hardyment, 1983) Now writers like JSC Abbott in *The Mother at Home* (1830) urged to ‘be the happy mother of a happy child, give your attention, and your efforts, and your prayers, to the great duty of training him up for God and heaven.’ (Abbott, 1830: 39)

A focus on the earliest stages of infancy in the shaping of character comes to the fore in 1830s childcare literature, but its motivation is not to solve philosophical questions about the nature of the mind and existence. The rise of observational studies, not philosophical speculation reflected the rise of empiricism in the natural sciences. Mme. Necker de Saussure, a French writer whose *Progressive Education* was published in French and English between 1828 and 1832 was widely read by British mothers including Elizabeth Gaskell. (Shuttleworth, 2010: 222) She stressed the importance of forming character early on in infancy as ‘It is then that we have the greatest chance of exercising that influence over the relative proportion of the different inclinations, in which consists the art of forming the character.’ (Saussure, 1939: 67)

Similar counsel was expressed by others. ‘Education of the heart,’ wrote Melesina Trench, ‘must begin in the cradle... ideas impressed on infancy-these- and, in most cases these alone, enable us to do our part, and so-operate with the assistance from above, in resisting strong and urgent temptation.’ (Trench, 1837: 12)

Gaskell’s diary also provides corroborative evidence about the greater attention paid to moulding character early on. She reveals a sense of urgency (1835-1838) about the education of her 6 month old daughter. Upon reading Mme. Necker de Saussure’s advice, she planned ‘to act on principles now which can be carried on through the whole of her education.’ (Chapple, 1950: 65)

Now that infancy was seen as the locus for the development of moral character, the mother’s psychological responsibilities increased alongside heightened anxiety to make a good job of it. Sarah Stickney Ellis’s *The*

Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility (1843) stressed the importance of a woman's virtuous qualities on the wellbeing of her child. 'Influence there must be arising out of the close connection and constant association of the mother and the child,' but she warns, 'that where good sense, and good principle, are wanting in the mother's conduct, the absence of these essentials to good influence...will...tell upon the characters of her children in after life to an alarming extent.' (Stickney Ellis, 1843: 53) She added that 'In vain might such a mother train her children according to the most approved and best established rules'. (Stickney Ellis, 1843: 53) Such a sense of maternal importance and accountability was nowhere to be found in Stanley or Wedgwood.

In the opening lines of her diary Gaskell dedicates the book to her daughter Marianne as 'a token of her Mother's love, and extreme anxiety in the formation of her little girl's character.' (Gaskell, 1923: 5) She openly chides herself for feeling jealous when Marianne shows affection to her Nurse Betsy. (Gaskell, 1923: 16) Gaskell describes with sensitivity the developing relationship between herself and Marianne. Her sense of responsibility for shaping Marianne's character is absolute and unquestioned. She worries that 'my dearest little girl, if, when you read this, you trace back any evil or unhappy feeling to my mismanagement in your childhood, forgive me, love!' (Gaskell, 1923: 6) Moreover, in her later fictional work, *The Old Nurse's Story*, (1852) she ends a story about a young girl's curse with the line 'alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age!' (Gaskell, 1852: 105) Motherhood now required not only maternal devotion but the perfection of the maternal soul to fulfil this task.

Interestingly, male childcare writers most burdened mothers with a sense of anxiety for the successes or failures of their offspring in later life. John SC Abbott in *The Mother at Home* (1830) wrote gravely: 'It was the mother of Byron who laid the foundation of his pre-eminence in guilt. She taught him to plunge into the sea of profligacy and wretchedness.' (Abbott, 1830: 37) Whereas George Washington's 'inestimable' mother, alongside God's hand, was a primary factor in the President's success. (Abbott, 1830: 14) Jabez Burns' *Mothers of the Wise and Good* (1846) sought to inspire mothers with tales of famous men who supposedly owed everything to maternal influence in infancy. Clearly, the growing sense of the power of the mother's role impelled such gentlemen to write these cautionary tales. With the greater recognition of maternal influence we also see more emphasis placed upon Wordsworth's notion of the importance of the 'discipline of love'. Andrew Combe's *Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy* (1840) identifies a possible connection between a loving mother and a loving child: 'If we wish to call out and give healthy development to the kindly and affectionate feelings in an infant' we must treat it 'with habitual kindness and affection, because these are the natural stimuli to such feelings, just as the light is to the eye, or sound to ear.' (Combe, 1840: 35) Mme. Necker de Saussure similarly describes

the importance of an attentive mother, who with ‘a smiling air, a caressing ascent, raises a smile on his lips...she has smiled affectionately on him; he feels that he is loved, and he loves in return.’ (Saussure, 1939: 144) This is now clearly Wordsworth’s territory.

However, others expressed alarm about excessive maternal affection, echoing Locke’s theories of spoiling the child. The philosopher repeatedly instructed parents to suppress their love in the interests of training up a virtuous child. ‘Parents being wisely ordained by Nature to love their children, are very apt, if Reason not watch their natural Affection very warily, I say, to let it run into Fondness.’ (Locke, 1690: 121) Abbott similarly explained the perils of over-indulgent love in the account of a vagrant: ‘Why is he there, far from his own pleasant fireside and the love of him? Because his mother never established any control over her boy. In his infancy she indulged him, under the influence of an overweening maternal fondness.’ (Abbott, 1830: 27) Particularly damning on the effect of unchecked maternal love, Thomas Bull in his *Maternal Management of Children* (1840) wrote that: ‘Tender human feelings are as useless as the blind caresses that cause animals to strangle their own young without the knowledge that we assume a gardener must have of plants.’ (Hardyment, 1983: 54).

Like Saussure and Combe, Wordsworth’s babe who when he ‘Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye’ (273) is capable of returning passion. Two writers of the 1830s shared remarkably similar views to Wordsworth on this aspect of infantile development. Sarah Lewis translated and added to passages from the French writer Louis Aimé Martin’s (1781-1844) book *De l'éducation des mères de famille* (1834) to form *Woman’s Mission* (1839). They explain ‘that in children sentiment precedes intelligence; the first answer to the maternal smile is the first dawn of intelligence; the first sensation is the responding caress. Comprehension begins in feeling; hence, to her who first arouses the feelings, who first awakens the tenderness, must belong the happiest influences.’ (Lewis et al, 1839: 28) This bears a striking resemblance to Wordsworth’s lines that with love, the infants ‘organs and recipient faculties/Are quickened, are more vigorous, his mind spreads/Tenacious of the forms which it receives’ (282-284).

Both Wordsworth and Lewis/Martin locate a crucial part of the development of the self at the beginning of life in the baby’s first sensual relations with the mother. Experiences of the new-born are therefore crucial. Although we have seen other writers in the 1830s such as Saussure and Trench recognise the importance of maternal care in emotional development, none go as far as Wordsworth and Lewis/Martin in their assertions that here lies the origins of the emergent self and the creation of a dynamic inner world. In this view the subjective self is always an intersubjective one, i.e. the child’s subjective sense of its inner world and its interactions not just with external objects but also the internal worlds of others. The baby is not just a recipient

of sensation but itself seeks interconnectedness with the subjective self of the mother.

In this sense I would argue that Wordsworth and Lewis/Martin understand the infant to have a pre-verbal affective self, whereas the tabula rasa model seems to believe the self is formed by passive cognitive registration of external stimuli. Although the tabula rasa model understands sensual experience to be formative from birth, following associationist logic it leaves no means of accounting for intersubjectivity and inner experience in shaping thought. Locke wrote in 1693 that 'little and almost insensible impressions on [their] tender infancies have very important and lasting consequences' (Locke, 1690: 53), but it was only once they reached the age of language that they began to develop the capacity for self-reflection, and hence intellectual thought. (Seigel, 2005:100) Locke and Hartley were adamant that feelings derive from ideas, and ideas are derived only once experience is reflected upon. Therefore self-reflection necessitates language to put reflection into thought. Their emphasis gives the impression that only in the later stages of infancy or childhood would the self really take meaningful shape. Newborns were considered to lack the full range of senses and faculties required for mature thought. Indeed, Locke felt it was in the early submission of the child to his father's will that began his education: 'Be sure then to establish the authority of a father as soon as he [the child] is capable of submission and can understand in whose power he is.' (Locke, 1690: 53) Whereas Wordsworth and Lewis/Martin propose a very different picture- 'the discipline of love' beginning in the first tender caresses of the mother.⁵

Wordsworth's account resembles that of Klein's 'memories in feelings'. She writes that the infant's feelings towards the mother are felt in a 'more primitive ways than language can express. When these pre-verbal emotions and phantasies are revived...they appear as 'memories in feelings'' (Klein, 1957: 180) Before the development of language, early experiences are encoded as recollections of feeling which aren't attached to words or concepts. (Spillius et al, 2011: 63) These ideas are also similar to Piaget's studies showing the capacity for pre-linguistic conceptualisation. (Coe, 1984: 257)

In addition, like Wordsworth, Lewis and Martin go on to make clear a more nuanced notion that the mother 'is not however to teach virtue, but to inspire it...What she wishes us to be, she begins by making us love, and love begets unconscious imitation.' (Lewis et al, 1839: 28) The claim that a mother inspires rather than teaches virtue was highly unusual in the 1830s. Saussure untypically says a mother should aim 'to influence the motives of children. At every age it is on the heart alone that any salutary effect can be produced; and

⁵ Rousseau's ideas on this matter are quite contradictory. Before the child is learning to walk and talk, he is nothing 'more than what he was in the womb of his mother: he had no sentiments, no ideas, he scarcely had sensations; he could not even feel his own existence.' Whereas later on in Book One, 'at the beginning of life...his sense experiences are the raw material of thought'.

at this early period it is only by sympathy that we can influence the heart.’ (Saussure, 1939 :79) More commonly writers like Trench, Abbott and Stickney Ellis stressed that defects of character could and should be ‘remedied by training’ (Stickney Ellis, 1843:14), much in the way that Catherine Stanley felt she could mould Owen. Locke’s reach and influence can be seen everywhere.

A counter appeal came from Sara Coleridge who expressed the belief that external training and discipline had its limits. In her correspondence with her brother Hartley Coleridge in 1833, she tells him not to attempt to ‘to pour sensibility, generosity, and such other good qualities, which cannot be supplied from without, but must well up from within, by buckets full into their [children’s] hearts.’ (Coleridge, 1873: 57) Instead, it is necessary ‘to give nature elbow room...to trust more to happy influences, and less to direct tuition’. (Coleridge, 1873: 57) Coleridge here demonstrates an understanding of the infant’s internal world as nourishing itself.

Coleridge also echoes Wordsworth’s conviction that emotional sensitivity breeds intelligence and creativity.⁶ In a letter to her husband in 1838, she remarks upon the temperament of her son Herbert: ‘Indeed I believe that this sensitiveness does itself tend to quicken and stimulate the intellect’ (Coleridge, 1873: 215), and ‘Where the senses are active and rapid ministers to the mind, supplying it abundantly and promptly with thought-materials, no wonder that the intellect makes speedy advances; and such sensitiveness is doubtless one constituent of a poet.’ (Coleridge, 1873: 215) In response to some theorist’s warnings of maternal over-indulgence, she wisely wrote in 1844 that ‘young people that are spoiled by an indulgent home are spoiled, I think, not by over-happiness, but from having been encouraged in selfishness’. (Coleridge, 1873: 305)

Sara Coleridge also kept a baby diary from 1830-1838, but for the purposes of this article her letters are much more illuminating. Her diary is largely preoccupied with her postnatal depression and opium addiction and this is related with much personal anguish. Her observations of Herbert and her daughter Edith are concerned with their physical growth and health, whilst her letters reveal a deep understanding of emotional and psychological development. This highlights one of the problems of using baby diaries as a source through which to garner attitudes and ideas. Mothers did not always feel that a baby diary was somewhere they wanted to explore their deeper feelings. Although Gaskell certainly used the diary to openly reflect upon her relationship with her daughter and her role as a mother, diaries like Sophia Holland’s are much less candid.

⁶ Although *The Prelude* was not published until after Wordsworth’s death in 1850, we cannot say for sure that William Wordsworth and his ties with the Coleridge family did not inspire some of Sara’s thinking. However in the letters she seems to come to these conclusions by herself, and furthermore expressed a somewhat serendipitous surprise at *The Prelude*’s ‘delightful’ content when she read it in 1850.

Sophia Holland, Gaskell's cousin by marriage began her diary in 1836 when her son Thurstan was 6 weeks old. (Chapple et al, 1996: 89) Holland adopts a fairly detached emotional tone. At five months old she writes that Thurstan began 'to hold out his arms to come to me to be fed'. (Chapple et al, 1996: 89) A month older, she notes that he cries out for her when he was not hungry, acknowledging that this attachment went beyond the desire for food. (Chapple et al, 1996: 89) But beyond this, Holland's sparse entries tell us nothing of her own thoughts and reflections.

Procuring an insight into the mother-infant relationship from baby diaries in part depends upon the psychological propensities and insight of the parent. Psychologist Kurt Koffka calls attention to the fact that 'these diaries of child-life... are not uninfluenced by the character of the writer...indeed, by the level of his child-psychology'. (Koffka, 1925: 31-32) This most likely applies to childcare advice writers also.

1870s: The Child of Science and Evolution

The Prelude was published in 1850, but by the late 1850s Romantic notions of the subjective self had been occluded by advances in scientific theory more concerned with objective study, most importantly Darwinian evolutionary thought. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was hugely influential, both in the realms of scientific debate and in Victorian society at large. Evolutionary biology became the primary way of understanding the development of homo-sapiens, their history and their genetic relationship to the natural world.

With Darwin's influence and the rise of empirical psychology in the 1860s, the mind of the child became an object for professional scientific and psychological study. (Humphreys, 1985: 79) By the 1870s, the Child-Study movement, a middle-class professional grouping, called for the widespread observation and scientific study of children. The observation of children and infants through diaries was inspired by Darwin and later championed by eminent psychologists such as James Sully and FH Champneys. (Wallace et al, 1994:14) These diaries⁷ became a specific scientific literature for the observation of early skills acquisition, particularly the acquisition of language. (Wallace et al, 1994: 23) Importantly authors wrote up their observations with publication in mind or at least to inform scientific debate. For example, Sully's diary was the basis for his *Studies of Childhood* (1895). (Sully, 1896: 399)

Darwin's own baby diary began in 1839, observing in close detail the development of his first child William Erasmus. Darwin was interested in showing that the physiological expression of emotions in humans was no different from those shown in animals. The observations he made culminated

⁷ For more information on baby diaries focussed on language development, see the bibliography of Carolyn Steedman's, *The Tidy House*, Virago Press, (1982), p.230.

in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, (1872) and ‘A biographical sketch of an infant’ published in *Mind* in 1877, where he paid much attention to the way in which his children demonstrated pleasurable feelings. With William at ‘Six weeks old & 3 days’, he recorded that his wife ‘Emma saw him smile- not only with her lips, but eyes,- Thinks he directed his eyes towards her face & after looking at her attentively, smiled- Anne smiled about the same time. Henrietta smiled at 3 weeks.’ (Darwin, 1847-1850, vol 4 :412) Taking a major conceptual step, the diary shows the notion of developmental phases. (Wallace et al, 1994: 24) Gaskell’s diary and other domestic diaries of earlier periods had no concept of demarcated stages. In 1877 Darwin specified the most important developmental stage as the first three years of life. ‘In these early years’ he wrote, ‘the brain is capable of receiving impressions, which, although retained unconsciously, the memory of them having totally disappeared, will be automatically rendered active.’ (Darwin, 1877) Here, Darwin provides scientific respectability for the development of the self in early infancy even though he was mainly concerned with stages of primitive mental mechanisms, rather than the foundations for adult subjectivity.

The Romantics unlike Darwin were with the constitution of the subjective self and the imagination. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth is dealing with the infant’s subjectivity and concomitant intersubjectivity. Sully, an important member of the Child Study movement admired Wordsworth’s valuation of the individual soul, but wrote in 1895 that the Child Study movement was interested in ‘the opening germ of intelligence from the colder point of view of science.’ (Sully, 1896: 399) Therefore a focus on the biological basis of emotional development gave a different though very important angle on infant development. There occurred a shift in emphasis away from mother-infant interaction and its developmental implications, to theories of genetic inheritance (ideas which were later manipulated by the eugenics movement). We also find this in the recurring preoccupation in the scientific diaries of Darwin and Sully as to whether or not a given behaviour is instinctive/’natural’ or learned. (Wallace et al, 1994: 23) In other words, the nature versus nurture debate.

The extent of the influence of evolutionary theory on views of the maternal role are to be found in the child care advice of the period. If Darwin could be parodied as reducing humans to merely advanced apes, then the child could be seen as a primitive in need of civilising. Henry Ashby wrote in *Health in the Nursery* (1898), ‘the child is destitute of any sort of conscience...Ages of civilisation have not succeeded in eradicating some of the most characteristic and unpleasant impulses of the brute.’ (Ashby, 1898; 92) Before it was the mother’s role to tame the soul, now it was the inner beast. Once again a belief that carers were required to civilise their children meant much was required from parenthood. ‘The discipline of love’ would no longer cut it in the cultivation of the right kind of child. Samuel Smiles’s *Character* (1871) argued

that ‘Mere instinctive love is not sufficient. Instinct, which preserves the lower creatures, needs no training; but human intelligence, which is in constant request in a family, needs to be educated.’ (Smiles, 1871: 92) Such opinions demonstrate a clear move from Wordsworth, Lewis/Martin and Sara Coleridge’s Romantic sensibility. Although a few writers of the 1830s and 40s such as Thomas Bull and JSC Abbott preached about the negative influences of maternal care, they reiterated the recurring theme of over-indulgent parenting. Whereas by the late nineteenth century, the majority of writers, such as Smiles and Marion Harland in her *Common Sense in the Nursery* (1886) felt a mother’s love would have little effect on the successful outcome of her progeny. Significantly, the mother as primary breast feeder was no longer desired. Instead the use of a Nurse was encouraged, and writers like Isabella Beeton argued that artificial food was as beneficial as breast milk. (Hardyment, 1983: 94)

Following their findings on inheritance, Darwin and his followers like William Thierry Preyer rejected notions of tabula rasa. (Wallace et al, 1994: 16) Preyer, an influential British physiologist working in Germany in the 1870s concluded from observations of his infant son to deduce that ‘The mind of the newborn child...does not resemble a tabula rasa upon which the senses first write their impressions’. (Preyer, 1988: 24) Instead ‘the tablet is already written upon before birth, with many illegible...marks, the traces of the imprint of countless sensuous impressions of long-gone generations.’ (Preyer, 1988: 24)

Conclusion: The vicissitudes of ideas and brilliant exceptions

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, three general trends in the understanding of the mother-infant relationship emerge. Before the 1830s, maternal attention was generally considered to be important to the development of the infant, but her importance did not go far beyond ensuring the physical well-being of her offspring. By the 1830s, advances in science as well as increasing evangelisation demanded the mother play a greater role in the spiritual and moral development of her children. Increasing importance was placed on the influence of the mother and her moral probity in shaping the child’s character. By the 1870s, with Darwin’s theory of evolution and the formalised scientific study of infancy, understandings of the development of the infant focused on the biological and evolutionary rather than the internal and subjective. As we have seen these are general trends in the written culture and may not take into account the ideas and practices that may have prevailed in middle and working class communities. I recognise my sources are limited to those of the leisured and motivated literate classes, but a huge section of the population were not blessed with the time to record observations and may not have had the resources or motivation to do so.

However, it is evident that Wordsworth was most ahead of his time and remains an outstanding exception. Wordsworth, unlike his contemporaries or predecessors explicitly expressed the importance of the connection between mother and infant as the basis for the development of the mind and the subjective self. We can see that only by the 1830s was this relationship acknowledged as formative by a wider public, and in a more limited sense. Attachment theorists like Bowlby in the mid-twentieth century along with Klein and developmental psychologists have established Wordsworth's wider implications as generally accepted truths. They also concur with Wordsworth on the detrimental effects of maternal deprivation. Recognising the importance of the mother's love and care for the infant, Wordsworth's goes further in explaining how the mother's love enables the infant to develop. His notion that the 'discipline of love' is vital for the healthy evolution of the intellect and imagination is now accepted with few dissenters. Wordsworth showed particular prescience in his intuitive understanding of the infant's intersubjectivity and capacity to create a dynamic internal world from the healthy attachment to his mother, through processes of projection and introjection.

The idea of inspiring cognitive and emotional development rather than teaching it behaviourally is still a hotly debated topic today. Whether there is a need for regulated feeding, sleeping and crying regimes continues to polarise parents and theorists. Recently journalist Anna Karpf has written that since the 1940s 'Disciplinarian advice has alternated with liberal advice: for every Gina Ford advocating controlled crying, there has been a liberal antidote- Dr Spock or Penelope Leach'. (Karpf, 2013: 5) We have seen that this fault line extends back well before the 1940s, and will probably continue to dominate debate in the foreseeable future.

Author James Fotheringham wrote in 1899 that it is 'in good part owing to him [Wordsworth], that we have studied the child-nature so much, so carefully, as we have lately been doing.' (Fotheringham, 1899: 65) Today this claim still rings true, a testament to the poet's genius not only in the field of literature but in the theory of self and mind.

Appendices

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative texts, context and reception, recent critical essays, (eds.) Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill, New York (1979), p.20-21.

Blessed the infant babe-
For with my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our being- blest the Babe
Nursed in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,

Doth gather passion from his mother's eye!
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,
Even in the first trial of its powers,
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detached
And loath to coalesce. Thus day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
In one beloved presence- nay, and more,
In that most apprehensive habitude
And those sensations which have been derived
From this beloved presence- there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of Nature that connect him with the world.
Emphatically such a being lives,
An inmate of this active universe.
From nature largely he receives, nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again;
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And- powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear and joy- his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds. Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life-
By uniform control of after years
In most abated and suppressed, in some
Through every change of growth or of decay
Preeminent till death.

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