

Motherhood, Children and Loss in the Works of Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, 1820-1852

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Abstract

This thesis traces a rhetoric of maternal loss in a group of hitherto relatively unexplored works by Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, from 1820 to 1852. I read Coleridge and Shelley not only as the daughters of famous authors, but as mothers themselves. In so doing I aim to show how Coleridge's and Shelley's conceptions of the family coalesced around loss.

This thesis argues that Coleridge and Shelley use the language of mourning to interrogate different types of absent presence. The absent presence was an enduring figure in nineteenth-century literary culture. Even if an individual was physically absent, their presence was still felt. In this thesis the absent presence refers to both deceased individuals and those who are 'lost', such as missing children and parents. It considers both the theological and secular significance of the absent presence in Coleridge's and Shelley's body of work. It uses a range of unpublished and unused manuscript material from the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley family archives, including correspondence, journals, commonplace books, biographical accounts, and verse. By using manuscripts by and related to Coleridge's and Shelley's parents and children, this thesis aims to develop a new analysis of intergenerational loss. By this I mean that Coleridge and Shelley mourn as mothers, daughters, wives, and widows. In so doing this thesis aims to develop a new analysis of Coleridge's and Shelley's work for and about children and motherhood within the context of mourning culture; to examine different forms of mourning and loss in the Romantic and Victorian periods; and to investigate how themes of loss can be shown to have shaped Coleridge's and Shelley's approaches to motherhood and childhood.

My analysis consists of four main chapters. The first two focus on Sara Coleridge. Chapter 1 considers the ways in which Coleridge presents herself as an absent mother in her 1830s poems to and for children. I argue that Coleridge uses maternal absence as a means of

interrogating the relationship between mothers and children. Chapter 2 extends this idea of maternal absence in its analysis of (un)dead mothers in Coleridge's fantasy novel, *Phantasmion* (1837). By '(un)dead' I mean mothers that die only to return. It argues that Coleridge uses the materiality of death to interrogate maternal absence. Chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to Mary Shelley. Chapter 3 develops my previous explorations of parental loss in its exploration of child abduction in Shelley's short stories for children, *Proserpine* and *Maurice; or, The Fisher's Cot* (both 1820). It contends that Shelley uses storytelling as an intergenerational strategy whereby lost child and grieving parent are reunited. My analysis is informed by Shelley's own experience as a grieving mother. Chapter 4 builds upon this line of thought by considering Shelley's position as a widowed mother in her travel memoir, *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844). This chapter seeks to highlight Shelley's self-fashioning as a widowed mother who grapples with the loss of her husband and children as she goes on a spiritual journey of recovery. The conclusion considers the legacy of maternal absence in regard to Jane, Lady Shelley and Edith Coleridge, both of whom used biography as a form of memorialisation. Full transcriptions of archival material referenced in this thesis are available in the Appendices.

By reading their work through the lens of maternal and child absence, this thesis aims to highlight the multiplicity of loss. Intergenerational dynamics are central to Coleridge's and Shelley's conceptions of the family. These writings reveal the nuance of loss in the Romantic and Victorian period. Coleridge and Shelley mourned as daughters, wives, and mothers. While this thesis is about Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, the themes of maternal and child loss have wider cultural significance throughout the period. It compares Coleridge and Shelley with writers such as Charlotte Smith, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sarah Fricker Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, William Godwin Jr., Felicia Hemans, Anne Grant, and Clotilda Elizabeth Stisted. Moreover,

it draws connections between the nineteenth-century and earlier literary representations of maternal loss. By so doing this thesis locates maternal and child loss as an enduring cultural phenomenon in literary history.

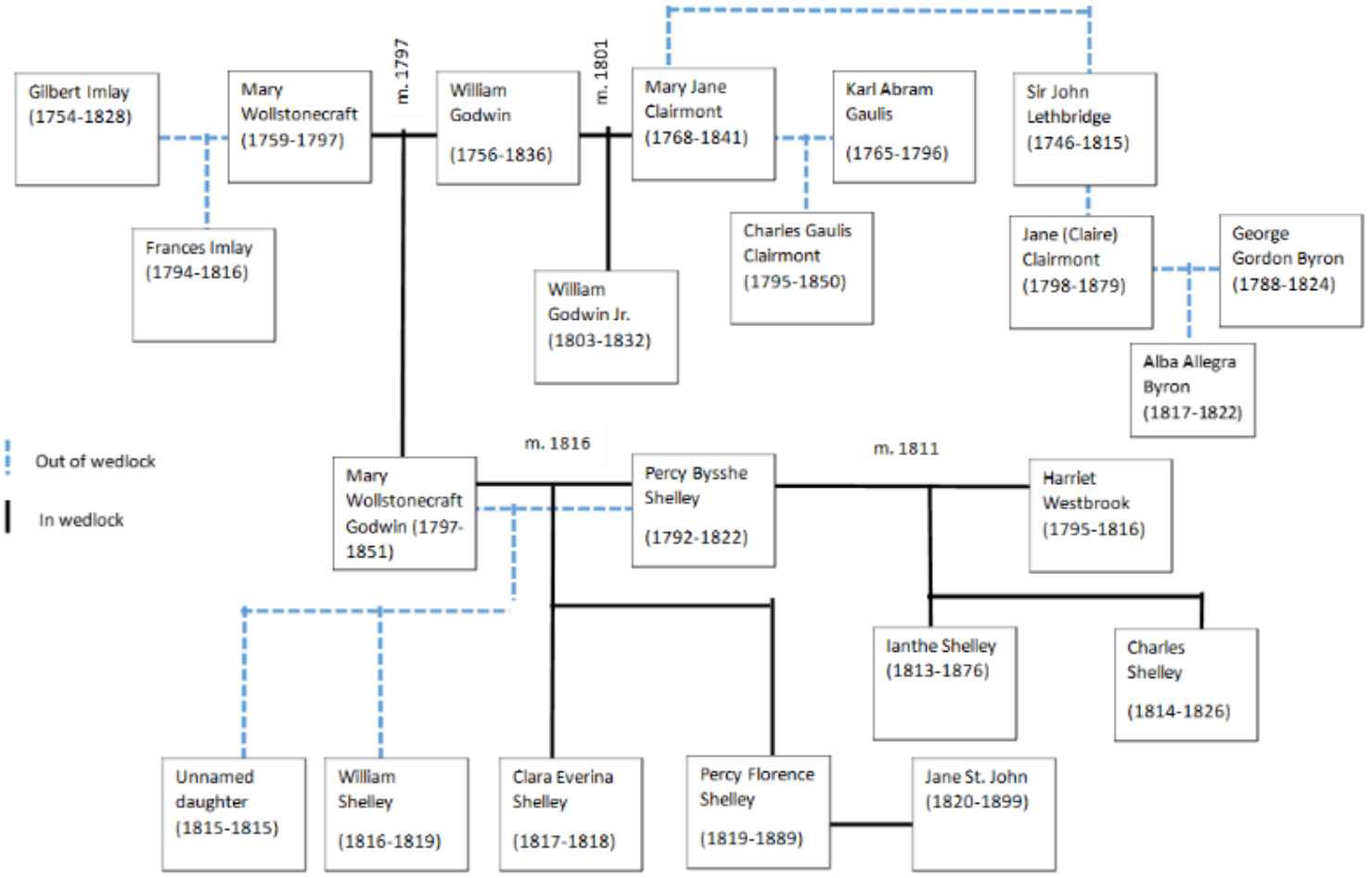
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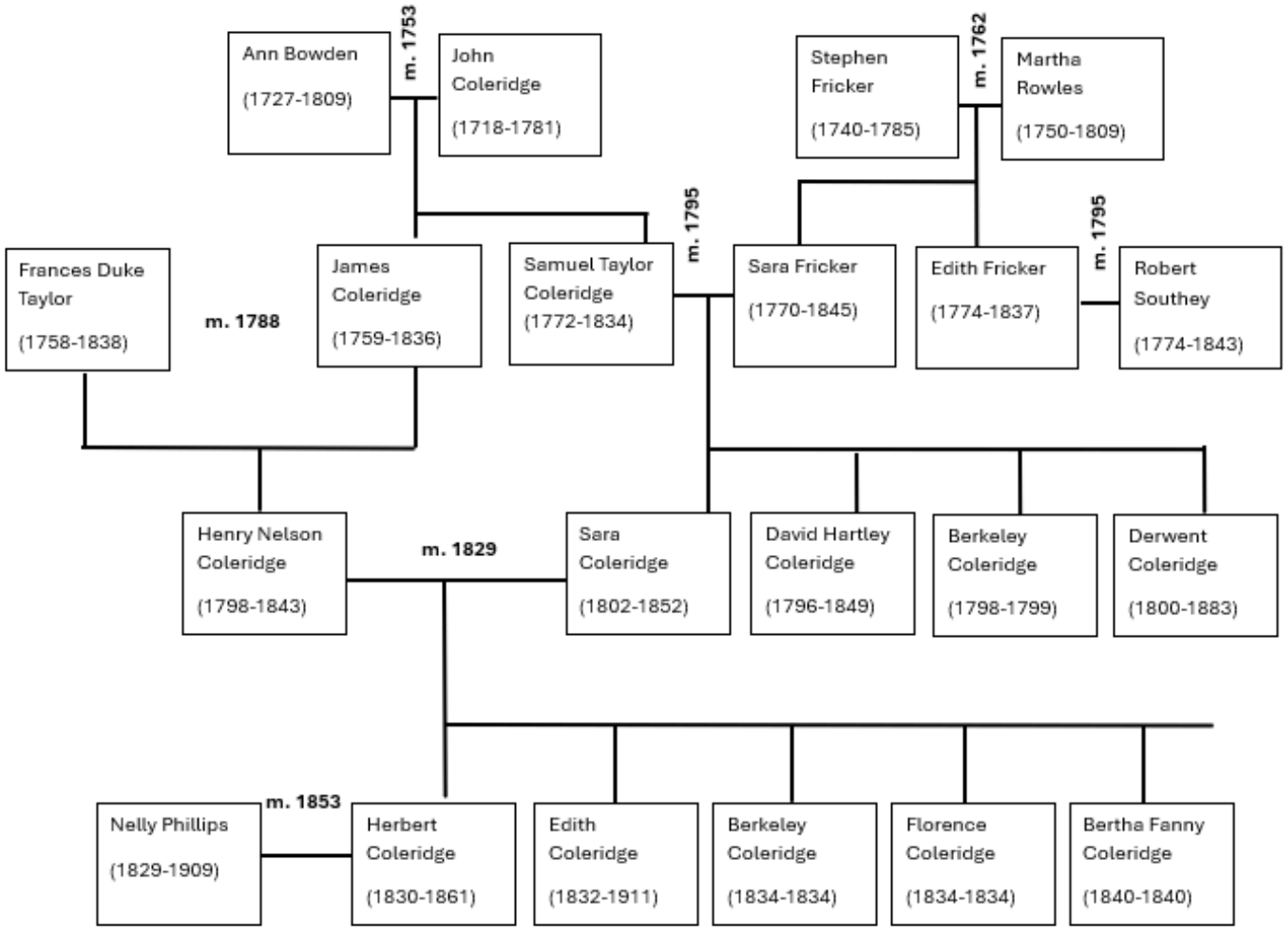
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Finally, I would like to thank my family. To them I am deeply grateful for their unwavering encouragement.



The Godwin-Shelley Family Tree



The Coleridge Family Tree

Chronology of Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley

This chronology covers the births and deaths of family members as well as the publication and writing of relevant works.

1797 30 August: Birth of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin to Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin.

10 September: Mary Wollstonecraft dies from septicaemia contracted during childbirth.

1802 23 December: Birth of Sara Coleridge to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Sarah Fricker.

1808 Samuel Taylor Coleridge separates from Sarah Fricker Coleridge.

1812 11 November: Mary briefly meets Percy Bysshe Shelley and his wife,

Harriet Westbrook.

1814 28 June: Mary elopes with Percy Bysshe Shelley, accompanied by Mary's stepsister, Jane 'Claire' Clairmont.

1815 22 February: Mary gives birth to her first daughter, who dies on 6 March.

1816 24 January: Mary gives birth to her son, William.

May-June: Mary travels with Percy and Claire, who is pregnant with Lord Byron's child, to Geneva. Begins writing *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*.

9 October: Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, commits suicide.

10 December: A pregnant Harriet is found dead in the Serpentine in London.

30 December: Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley marry.

1817 12 January: Birth of Claire's daughter, Alba (christened Allegra) Byron.

14 May: Mary completes *Frankenstein*.

2 September: Mary gives birth to a daughter, Clara.

1818 1 January: Publication of *Frankenstein*.

24 September: Clara dies in Venice.

1819 7 June: William Shelley dies of malaria in Rome.

12 November: Mary gives birth to Percy Florence.

1820 April-May: Mary writes *Proserpine* and *Midas*.

1822 Publication of Sara's translation of Martin Dobrizhoffer, *An Account of the Abipones: An Equestrian People of Paraguay*.

19 April: Allegra Byron dies of typhus.

16 June: Mary has a serious miscarriage.

8 July: Percy drowns in the Gulf of Spezia aged twenty-nine; his body washes ashore ten days later.

8 October: Mary begins the 'Journal of Sorrow'.

1823 3 January: Sara and her mother meet with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He has not seen them in ten years.

5 January: Sara meets her cousins, Henry Nelson Coleridge and John Taylor Coleridge.

21 March: Sara and Henry become secretly engaged.

25 August: Mary returns to London with Percy Florence.

1824 19 April: Byron dies at Missolonghi aged thirty-six.

June: Mary publishes the *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Percy's father, Sir Timothy Shelley, threatens to withdraw Percy Florence's allowance should she bring the Shelley name before the public again.

1825 Henry accompanies his cousin, William Hart Coleridge, to Barbados.

Henry publishes *Six Months in the West Indies*.

Publication of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character*.

1829 3 September: Sara and Henry marry.

1830 7 October: Birth of Sara's first son, Herbert.

1831 Revised edition of *Frankenstein* published.

1832 2 July: Sara gives birth to a daughter, Edith.

8 September: Mary's half-brother, William Godwin Jr., dies of cholera aged twenty-nine.

1834 14 January: Sara gives birth to a set of twins, Berkeley and Florence, who die on 16 January.

25 July: Samuel Taylor Coleridge dies aged sixty-one.

Publication of Sara's *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children*.

1835 August-October: Sara visits family relatives in Ottery St Mary with Herbert and Edith; experiences a breakdown at Ilchester on the return journey to London. Revises *Phantasmion* while at Ilchester.

1837 Publication of Sara's *Phantasmion*.

1838 10-11 March: Sara gives birth to a stillborn child.

1839 Publication of the *Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*.

1840 16 July: Birth of Sara's daughter, Bertha Fanny, who dies on 26 July.

1841 January: Henry begins to show signs of spinal disease.

September: Sara and Henry travel to Belgium.

1843 17 January: Sara begins the 'Book of Mourning: Deaths of Relations and Friends'.

26 January: Henry Nelson Coleridge dies of spinal paralysis aged forty-four.

21 March: Robert Southey dies aged sixty-eight.

1844 April: Sir Timothy Shelley dies; Percy Florence inherits the Shelley baronetcy and estate.

July: Publication of Mary's *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843* in two volumes.

1845 24 September: Sarah Fricker Coleridge dies of a stroke aged seventy-five. Sara, her daughter, was visiting Herbert in Eton at the time.

1848 22 June: Percy Florence marries Jane St. John.

October: Mary begins to show signs of a brain tumour.

1849 6 January: Hartley Coleridge dies aged fifty-two.

1850 23 April: William Wordsworth dies aged eighty.

Summer: Sara notices a lump in her breast. She is under regular medical supervision from then on in fear that it could be cancerous.

17 December: Mary is diagnosed with a brain tumour.

1851 1 February: Mary dies aged fifty-three.

8 February: Mary is buried in Bournemouth with her parents, who were exhumed from St. Pancras at Jane, Lady Shelley's behest.

8 September: Sara begins her autobiography for Edith. It would remain incomplete at her death.

1852 3 May: Sara dies aged forty-nine. She is buried alongside her mother, father, and husband at St. Michael's, Highgate.

1859 Publication of the *Shelley Memorials*.

1861 23 April: Herbert Coleridge dies of pulmonary tuberculosis aged thirty.

1873 Publication of the *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge, Edited by Her Daughter*.

1874 *Phantasmion* is reissued with an introduction by Sara's nephew, John Duke Coleridge.

Note on Transcriptions

This thesis presents transcriptions of hitherto unpublished and unused manuscripts from the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley family papers. It includes correspondence, journals, and verse written by Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, as well as extended family members and friends.

Original spelling, punctuation, and grammar has been observed. This is to ensure that the transcriptions reflect the original manuscript as closely as possible. I have used '[sic]' to denote erroneous spelling. For instance, 'wich [*sic*] she wrote in the intervals of hysterics'.[1] Where an individual has inserted a word above or below the regular line, I have used ^...^. An example of this is, '^like purple violets with dew upon them in the sunshine^'.[2] Abbreviations are also kept, such as 'believe me ever affect. & dutifully yours'.[3] Deletions are observed, for example: 'lovely in mind & person ~~& under her influence~~'.[4] Any word that has been underlined in the manuscript is underlined in the transcription. For instance, 'It was not her <u>face</u> I saw'.[5] The transcription is semi-diplomatic, with the regular lineage of the letter not observed (unless when quoting lines of poetry, where lineage has been kept). This is to increase the readability and clarity of the transcriptions. Paragraphs have been indented when the author has started a new line. All manuscripts are dated except undated ones, which are marked as 'n.d.'. Where an approximate date of composition can be inferred, I have added a 'c.' for 'circa'.

[1] Sara Coleridge, 'To Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge', 28 February 1834. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.9).
[2] Sara Coleridge, 'Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death', July 1840. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.5).
[3] Sara Coleridge, 'To Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge', 28 February 1834. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.9).
[4] Jane, Lady Shelley, 'To Helen Moore', c. August 1885, the Bodleian Library. MS Abinger c. 73 119-20.
[5] Sara Coleridge, 'To Isabella Fenwick', 1 October 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 10.2-3).

Obscurities within the manuscript are denoted by [MS torn] or [MS obscured]. For example, '[MS torn] none but the Nightingale and the River Y'.[6] Additional editorial interventions are marked by [...]. This is to provide more information about individuals or places referred to in the manuscripts. For instance, 'Fanny's [Duke Patteson, Henry's sister] taking charge of the children for so long a time'.[7] Where necessary, I have directed the reader to the list of Figures. This is to supplement information provided in the main body of the thesis. For example, I have included an image of Sara Coleridge's letter to Frances Duke Taylor (28 February 1834) as it includes postscripts by Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge. Additional information about the manuscripts is provided in the Appendix.

[6] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'To Samuel Taylor Coleridge', 25 March 1799. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3).
[7] Sara Coleridge, 'To Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge', 28 February 1834. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.9).

Introduction

Overview

On 23 April 1795, Anna Augusta de Foville died after giving birth to her first son, who survived but a few days. Anna Augusta was the beloved daughter of the poet Charlotte Smith, who was profoundly affected by her daughter's death. Writing to William Godwin on the news of Mary Wollstonecraft's passing in 1797, Smith reflects on the events of her life:

> my wounds are all bleeding afresh;—I ought not to say afresh, for never never have they ceas'd to drain my heart of its best blood since the fatal 23rd of April 1795—and yet I have tears left for the event I shall always deplore as a friend; that of the 10th of Sept. 1797—Is this world indeed govern'd by a benignant an omnipotent being?—why are we here?—There is a sentence I shall never forget in the last work I have ever seen of Mary Wollstonecraft. 'What is existence but a ^painful^ consciousness of wretchedness.' –I have no other consciousness of my identity I think than that I am the same unhappy person who was at barely fifteen, sold to an ideot [*sic*]—& from the Sussex hills, condemn'd to be shut up in a wretched street in the City;—who once had a daughter she adored & who deserved all her fondness; but who now, with many other Children round her—; has nothing!... Let me know by a line when you can call, as I will be without company—I should have a melancholy pleasure in seeing the two poor little Girls, but neither my mental or bodily strength are equal to a call at no 29 ^Sommers Town^ now—[8]

[8] Charlotte Smith, 'To William Godwin', 7 December 1797. The Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford (MS. Abinger c. 3, fols. 109-110).

Smith's letter of condolence sheds light on different maternal relationships. She grieves the loss of Anna Augusta—herself a mother for a short time—while also pondering the impact Wollstonecraft's death will have on Godwin's daughters. This in turn points to the co-existence of different forms of intergenerational loss. In this thesis I trace a rhetoric of maternal and child absence in the works of Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley between 1820 and 1852. As the daughters of famous authors, Coleridge's and Shelley's writings consistently interrogate the family unit. This thesis reads them not only as daughters, but as mothers themselves. While this thesis is about Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, the themes of maternal and child loss have wider cultural significance throughout the period. Indeed, as Smith's letter to Godwin shows, maternal loss has a broader impact on the family unit: Smith lost not only a daughter, but a grandchild. This thesis situates Coleridge's and Shelley's works within the context of the serial losses they encountered throughout their lives. In so doing this thesis seeks to demonstrate how Coleridge's and Shelley's ideas of mothering and the family coalesced around issues of loss.

By focusing on Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley, this thesis responds to an ever-increasing interest in women's writing. Coleridge wrote poems, prose, essays, reviews, letters, diaries, journals, and began an autobiography. With her husband (and eldest brother, Derwent) she edited her father's work. Although Coleridge wrote up until her death in 1852, I focus primarily on what she wrote in the 1830s and 1840s. During this period Coleridge wrote extensively about her children and experience of mothering, as well as the loss of her own mother. My corpus includes a group of relatively unexplored texts, such as Coleridge's 1830s poems addressed to her children and her fantasy novel, *Phantasmion* (1837). well as two of Shelley's short stories for children, *Maurice; or, The Fisher's Cot* and *Proserpine* (both 1820) and her travel memoir, *Rambles in Germany and Italy in the Years 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844). I argue that loss and absence are refracted through multiple literary forms.

This thesis uses a range of hitherto unpublished and overlooked manuscripts to highlight Coleridge's and Shelley's interest in motherhood and loss.

I have chosen to analyse the period between 1820 and 1852 as it reflects Coleridge's and Shelley's transition from wife to widowed mother. It also includes the period of Sarah Fricker's death (1845), as well as the deaths of Shelley (1851) and Coleridge (1852). The selected date range of this thesis includes different familial relationships and forms of loss, from Shelley's mourning of her children and husband in the 1820s to Coleridge's mourning of her mother in the 1840s. It aims to uncover the relational roles of daughter, wife, and mother that Coleridge and Shelley occupied.

This thesis combines studies of motherhood with studies of nineteenth-century death culture. In *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (2013) Mark Sandy argues that '[b]oth grief and mourning centre on irreplaceable loss, although grief does extend to loss brought about by other kinds of change and is not exclusive (in the way that mourning is by its very nature) to death'.[9] 'Grief', 'mourning', and 'loss' do not always refer exclusively to death. For example, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode', the 'grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear' refers to the poet's macabre 'viper thoughts'.[10] This thesis applies and extends this knowledge by exploring different forms of loss in Coleridge's and Shelley's writings for and about children and mothering. While most of the texts analysed in this thesis centre around the deaths of loved ones, Shelley's *Proserpine* and *Maurice* (examined in Chapter Three) centre on child abduction. Despite the variation in definition of what it means to be 'lost', this thesis argues that both Coleridge and Shelley use the language and imagery of mourning to reflect on and interrogate the affective ties between mothers and children.

[9] Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (New York: Ashgate, 2013), p. 2.
[10] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, qtd. in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 694-696 (lns. 21-94).

Although Mitzi Myers criticises the scholarly tendency of 'privileging the confessional' in literature, this thesis uses a biographical framework to illuminate Coleridge's and Shelley's interest in and responses to loss.[11] My reading of their fiction is informed by their correspondence, diaries, and journals, as well as commonplace books such as Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' (1843-1851), which was used to record the deaths of family and friends as well as to transcribe verse, hymns, and obituaries. It is in these manuscripts that Coleridge and Shelley ruminate on their losses, both marital and maternal. Furthermore, a biographical framework reveals the similarities between Coleridge and Shelley: both were the daughters of famous authors and edited their father's and husband's works respectively. I refer to a range of the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley family papers throughout this thesis to highlight different intergenerational relationships. By drawing attention to previously unused archive materials, this thesis seeks to position Coleridge's and Shelley's work as intergenerational relics. I define 'intergenerational relic' as an artefact that mediates relationships between parents and children.

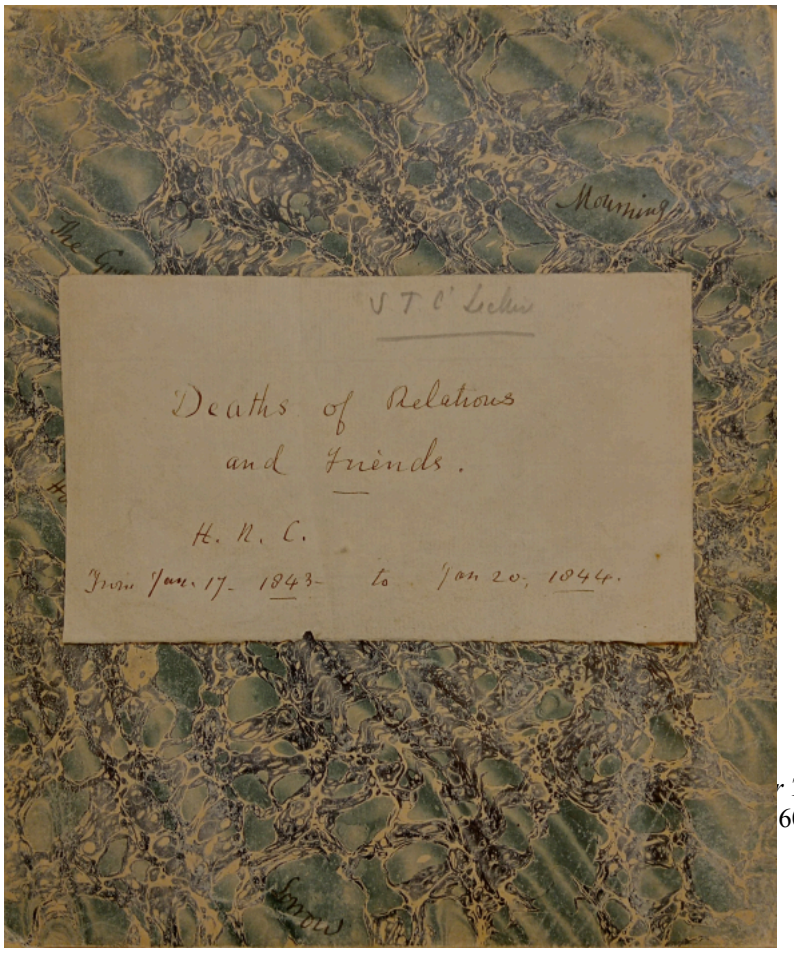


Figure 1: Front and back cover of volume 1 of Sara Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' (1843-1851). She has written words like 'mourning', 'sorrow', and 'grave'.

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In this introductory chapter, I will situate my discussion of Coleridge and Shelley within the context of family biography, legacies, and memorialization. Then I will delineate my methodology and provide brief overviews of my chapters. The aim of this thesis is to develop a new analysis of Coleridge's and Shelley's work for and about children and motherhood within the context of mourning culture; to examine different forms of mourning and loss in the Romantic and Victorian periods; and to investigate how themes of loss can be shown to have shaped Coleridge's and Shelley's approaches to motherhood and childhood. It combines scholarship on family writing and networks with studies of death and grief: in so doing it seeks to shed light on the significance of death and absence in Coleridge's and Shelley's writings about motherhood and children.

The first part of this introductory chapter frames Coleridge's and Shelley's position as daughters within their respective families. It provides a brief overview of their fraught relationships with their fathers and their attachment to the memory of their mothers. Unlike Shelley, whose mother died when she was born, Coleridge was in her forties when she lost her mother. Nonetheless, despite the difference in personal circumstances, I argue that the deaths of Wollstonecraft and Fricker had a profound effect on their daughters. I then consider Coleridge's and Shelley's role as mothers themselves. It begins by delineating their general interest in maternity before turning to their experiences of infant loss. My analysis here is supported by excerpts from Shelley's correspondence, as well as Coleridge's hitherto unpublished 'Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death' (1840). Section 3 traces Coleridge's and Shelley's experience as widows. I suggest that their widowed identities were bound up with their identities as mothers. Using entries from Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow' (1824-40) as well as previously unpublished accounts from Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' (1843-51), this section aims to show how they conceived of their dead husbands as absent presences. Informed by Coleridge's and Shelley's relational roles as daughters, mothers, and widows, section 4 explores their role as family biographers. This section argues that biography functioned as a catalogue of loss, with both Coleridge and Shelley negotiating these multiple co-existing personas. Section 5 outlines the thesis structure.

Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley as Daughters

Just as the recovery of women's writing has become a firmly established topic of research, so too has the family. This interest is reflected in various monographs published over recent decades, including Naomi Tadmor's *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (2001), Michelle Levy's *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (2008), Scott Krawczyk's *Romantic Literary Families* (2009),

Elizabeth Thiel's *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal* (2008), and Madeleine Wood's *Parents and Children in the Mid-Victorian Family: Traumatic Encounters* (2020).[12] Analyses of the Coleridge and Shelley families has also garnered interest, such as Julie A. Carlson's *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (2007), Sharon Joffe's *The Kinship Coterie and the Literary Endeavours of the Women in the Shelley Circle* (2007), Katie Waldegrave's *The Poets' Daughters: Dora Wordsworth and Sara Coleridge* (2013), and Beatrice Turner's *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection, 1820-1850* (2017).[13] This thesis builds upon these studies of the Romantic family by exploring Coleridge's and Shelley's relational roles as daughters, mothers, wives, and widows. By so doing it seeks to shed light on the significance of intergenerational loss in their lives and works.

The households in which Coleridge and Shelley spent their childhood and youth informed their approach to the family unit. Both grew up in socially intergenerational households. Greta Hall was Coleridge's childhood home, where she lived with her mother and two brothers, Hartley and Derwent, her uncle Robert Southey and his family, and her aunt Mary Lovell. The Godwin-Shelley family consisted of both blood and non-blood relations. Shelley lived with her father, his second wife Mary Jane Godwin and her two children, Jane (known as Claire) and Charles Clairmont, as well as her half-siblings Fanny Imlay and William Godwin Jr. The intricacies of these different familial relationships sheds

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[12] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Elizabeth Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Madeleine Wood, *Parents and Children in the Mid-Victorian Novel: Traumatic Encounters and the Formation of Family* (Cham: Springer, 2020).
[13] Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007); Sharon L. Joffe, *The Kinship Coterie and the Literary Endeavours of the Women in the Shelley Circle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Katie Waldegrave, *The Poets' Daughters: Dora Wordsworth and Sara Coleridge* (London: Hutchinson, 2013); Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection, 1820-1850* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

light on Coleridge's and Shelley's roles as daughters with one absent parent. Although Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived at Greta Hall intermittently from 1800 to 1803, he was absent for most of Coleridge's childhood and youth, while Wollstonecraft died days after Shelley was born.

Both Coleridge and Shelley had complicated relationships with their fathers. After Samuel Taylor Coleridge separated from his wife in 1808, he would not see his children for over a decade. This absence was a shaping influence on the lives and works of the Coleridge children. Much has been said about Hartley's fraught relationship with his father. While Judith Plotz suggests that '[a]ll Hartley's writings and all Hartley's adult behaviour explicitly and implicitly present a child who will not grow up', recent analyses by Pete Newbon and Nicola Healey challenge the historical assumption of Hartley as an 'eternal child'.[14] Such arguments reconfigure the Bloomian taxonomy of the 'anxiety of influence'—which describes an author's struggle to attain the reputation of their literary forebears—by exploring Hartley as an author in his own right.[15] This thesis builds upon Newbon and Healey by proposing a different understanding of 'inheritance'. Instead of reiterating Bloom's model of influence, this thesis will explore the family unit in terms of intergenerational and maternal structures. In other words, this thesis is interested in both the textual and biological threads of the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley families.

While Shelley's father was not absent during her childhood, she too expressed ambiguity towards her parents. Shelley's relationship with Godwin deteriorated after she eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1814. Moreover, her dislike of Mary Jane Godwin is a

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[14] Judith Plotz, 'Childhood Lost, Childhood Regained: Hartley Coleridge's Fable of Defeat', *Children's Literature*, 14 (1986), 133-148 (p. 133); Pete Newbon, *The Boy-Man, Masculinity and Immaturity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 204; See also Nicola Healey, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge: The Poetics of Relationship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[15] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1997).

well-worn topic in Shelley criticism.[16] Tadmor's observation that 'the word 'family' was also used in the eighteenth century to refer to circles of kin both within and beyond households' applies to the Godwin-Shelley families.[17] Throughout this introductory chapter and in Chapter Three, which analyses intergenerational structures in more depth, I refer to the 'Godwin family', 'Shelley family' and 'Godwin-Shelley circle'. The Godwin family refers to William Godwin, his wives, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Jane Godwin, and their children, Fanny Imlay, Mary Shelley, Claire and Charles Clairmont, and William Godwin Jr. The Shelley family refers to Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley, as well as their children, William, Clara, and Percy Florence. The Godwin-Shelley circle includes friends, such as Lord Byron, Mary Hays, Margaret King Moore, and Eliza Fenwick. I will argue in Chapter Three that the recovery of a lost child in Shelley's *Proserpine* and *Maurice* is dependent on the recovery of the blood family. For the purposes of this introductory chapter, I will explore the significance of Coleridge's and Shelley's familial relationships.

This thesis reads Coleridge's and Shelley's familial relationships within the context of loss. It focuses especially on maternal relationships, as both Coleridge and Shelley were deeply affected by the deaths of their mothers. Wollstonecraft's profound influence on Shelley's life and works has been the subject of various studies. Charlotte Gordon's dual biography of Wollstonecraft and Shelley, *Romantic Outlaws* (2015) interweaves the lives of mother and daughter to argue that Wollstonecraft was a shaping maternal influence on her daughter, even though she passed away days after her birth.[18] In her discussion of the legacies of Wollstonecraft and Godwin on Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and *Matilda* (1820), Pamela Clemit observes that '[t]he multiple literary, political, and philosophical influences of Godwin and Wollstonecraft may be traced in all six of Mary

[16] See Sharon L. Joffe, *The Kinship Coterie*, p. 22.
[17] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, p. 103.
[18] Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* (London: Windmill Books, 2015).

Shelley's full-length novels, as well as in her tales, biographies, essays, and other shorter writings'.[19] This biological, biographical, and literary connection between mother and daughter emerges in Shelley's correspondence. In a letter to Leigh Hunt dated August 1823, Shelley notes that 'Mrs. K[enny] says that I am grown very like my Mother, especially in Manners—in my way of addressing people—this is the most flattering thing any one cd say to me'.[20] Writing to Frances Wright D'Arusmont on 12 September 1827, Shelley remarks that '[t]he memory of my Mother has been always been the pride & delight of my life; & the admiration of others for her, has been the cause of most of the happiness (of my life) I have enjoyed'.[21] Although Shelley had no actual memory of her mother, she was a formative presence in her life. Godwin hung John Opie's 1797 portrait of Wollstonecraft in his study, and an anecdote relates how Shelley learned to read by tracing the words on her mother's tombstone in St. Pancras Churchyard, where she would later declare her love for Percy Bysshe Shelley.[22] As Joffe writes, 'as her letters and journals indicate, Shelley completely idealized Wollstonecraft whom she only encountered through the latter's own writings. From her mother's texts, Shelley was able to construct a notion of the type of mother Wollstonecraft might have been had she lived'.[23] This suggests that Shelley compensates for her deceased mother's absence by reconstituting her presence through writing, an idea which I will take forward in this introductory chapter.

Maternal absence is predominant in Shelley's fiction. Many of her characters are introduced as or become motherless, including Matilda, Victor Frankenstein, and Elizabeth

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[19] Pamela Clemit, '*Frankenstein*, *Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 26-44 (p. 26).
[20] Mary Shelley, 'To Leigh Hunt', 18/19 August 1823, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,* 3 vols*,* ed. by Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 376.
[21] Mary Shelley, 'To Frances Wright', 12 September 1827, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,* 3 vols, ed. by Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 4.
[22] Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws*, p. 3; p. 78.
[23] Sharon L. Joffe, ''The Instinct of Nature Spoke Audibly': Representations of the Mother-Child Bond in Mary Shelley's Fiction', in *The Literary Mother: Essays on Representations of Maternity and Child Care*, ed. by Susan C. Staub (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), pp. 117-137 (p. 118).

Falkner of *Falkner* (1837). While Ethel Lodore's mother is alive, she has no memory of her. Ethel differs from many of Shelley's other motherless characters in that she eventually reunites with Lady Lodore. In Chapter Three I explore different types of motherlessness and childlessness in my analysis of *Proserpine* and *Maurice*, both of which focus on a child forcibly separated from their parents. For now, it is worth considering the pervasiveness of maternal absence in Shelley's writings. As I have mentioned in the previous section of this introductory chapter, Shelley was haunted by the memory of her mother. Joffe's articulation of Wollstonecraft's death as Shelley's 'original absence' suggests that it was a landmark event in her life.[24] Joffe argues that Shelley's later novels present a more complicated and sophisticated view of parenting. For her, *Falkner and Lodore* reflect Shelley's 'unrelenting march of fate' in the 1830s, in which she struggled to negotiate finances with her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley.

As the daughter of literary celebrities, much has been said about Shelley's role within the Godwin-Shelley family and how she extends and challenges her parents' literary and political thought. Coleridge too was born into a literary family, although her mother, Sarah Fricker, has been relatively overlooked in the field of Romantic and Coleridgean studies. Despite the publication of Molly Lefebure's *The Bondage of Love: A Life of Mrs. Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1986) and Stephen Potter's edited collection of her letters to Thomas Poole, *Minnow Among Tritons: Mrs. S.T. Coleridge's Letters to Thomas Poole, 1799-1834* (1934), many of Fricker's manuscripts remain unpublished and unused. Indeed, as Linda Reesman points out, 'Sara Fricker Coleridge has lacked recognition as an intellectual and literary figure in her own right while wrongly condemned by critics and friends as an ill-tempered and insensible wife'.[25] Her reputation matches that of Shelley's stepmother,

[24] Ibid., *The Kinship Coterie*, p. 73.
[25] Linda Reesman, *The Social Imagination of the Romantic Wife in Literature: Marriage, Virtue, and Friendship* (New York: Routledge, 2025), p. 163.

Mary Jane Godwin, who has likewise been subjected to relatively unflattering portrayals in critical biographies. The idea that Fricker was unintellectual can be traced back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's correspondence, in which he tells his wife that 'in sex, acquirements, and in the quantity and quality of natural endowments whether of Feeling, or of Intellect, you are the Inferior'.[26] Using a selection of hitherto unpublished and unused material, this thesis will rehabilitate Fricker as a central presence in Coleridge's life and work. In so doing it will highlight the significance of Coleridge's maternal relationships.

Coleridge had a close relationship with her mother. For most of her life Fricker lived with her daughter and Henry Nelson Coleridge. She was a formative influence on Coleridge: she taught French at Greta Hall and, after Coleridge's marriage in 1829, helped care for her grandchildren, Herbert and Edith. Extant correspondence provides further evidence of their mutual affection. In a previously unpublished letter to Henry Nelson Coleridge dated 10 November 1836, Coleridge writes, 'God bless and preserve my blessed mother! She has ever been the most devoted of mothers'.[27] The letter was written from Ilchester, where Coleridge was recuperating after suffering a breakdown on the return journey from Ottery St Mary. I will discuss the Ilchester episode in more detail in Chapter Two. For now, it is worth considering the affective ties between mother and daughter.

One of the most significant events to take place in Coleridge's life was the death of her mother. Fricker died of a stroke in September 1845. Though she had been bedridden on account of shortness of breath, her death was unexpected. Coleridge was visiting Herbert in Eton at the time. She was deeply affected by Fricker's death and expressed regret that she was absent in Eton. The details surrounding Fricker's death are repeated in Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' and correspondence. Fricker had collapsed while dressing that morning; the

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'To Mrs. S.T. Coleridge', 23 November 1802, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, II,* 3 vols, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 888.
[27] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 10 November 1836. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 6.5-7.2).

family nurse, Ann Parrott, had rung the bell for the cook, only to discover Fricker's body upon re-entering the bedroom. Her death is marked in the following account in Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning':

> Friday afternoon Sep 26—1845—10 Chester Place Regent's Park
>
> Alas! My beloved mother is no more. Little did I expect this when I left home on Tuesday the 16th day 4 o clock [MS obscured]. She said when I came to take leave of her in the drawing room – that it was the last time I must leave her. I thought that this was probably so but only said that she must send for me directly if she felt particularly poorly. I had no immediate apprehension whatever. On Wednesday Sep 24 Derwent came over to tell me that we had lost our dear mother that she had died that day at a quarter past eight, while washing her face or just after putting on her cap after washing downstairs. My soul is very very sorrowful I must not say unto death, the words of our blessed Saviour yet I am longing to go & rejoin those that are gone – one great tie to earth is snapped – My children still tie me to earth. But for them – how little should I have to keep me here![28]

These details are repeated in the correspondence of extended family members. Coleridge's sister-in-law, Mary Edward Coleridge, reported to Emily Trevenen that Coleridge sank into 'a violent burst of hysteric grief, which terminated in a good fit of crying'.[29] Writing to her brother-in-law John Taylor Coleridge, Coleridge laments, 'The death-silence is awful. I had to think of her every minute in the day – to be always on my guard against noise – and she was one that made herself felt – dear creature! – every hour in the day. I shall never be so missed by anyone – my life is so much stiller & more to myself.' Coleridge here expresses

[28] Sara Coleridge, 'Book of Mourning', 26 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.1).
[29] Mary Edward Coleridge, 'To Emily Trevenen', 24 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.8).

how lonely she felt at the loss of her mother. For most of her life Fricker had lived with her daughter, caring for Herbert and Edith during Coleridge's and Henry Nelson Coleridge's absence. So too did Fricker and Coleridge frequently correspond. Thus, Fricker's death served as a cruel reminder to Coleridge of the irrevocability of the past. In the same letter, Coleridge surmises that 'Children cannot fill [a mother's] place – though they are much…But my mother connected me with all my past life'.[30] Coleridge's letters from this period reveal the intensity of her grief. They also shed light on the different maternal relationships that existed within the Nelson Coleridge household. For while Coleridge wrote extensively about her own maternal experiences (in prose, verse, diaries, and correspondence), she also wrote widely about her mother, especially in the days following Fricker's sudden death.

Although Coleridge and Shelley grew up in different circumstances, the deaths of their mothers had a formative impact on them. Shelley never knew Wollstonecraft; she relied on testimonies from family and friends, as well as Wollstonecraft's body of work, to construct her own memory of Wollstonecraft. Coleridge lived with Fricker for most of her life and grieved sorely for her loss in 1845. These maternal relationships are important because they highlight the intergenerational structures that existed within the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley families. I will argue that these intergenerational relationships are rooted in loss. The next section of this introductory chapters explores Coleridge's and Shelley's experiences of maternal loss.

Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley as Mothers

Ideas surrounding maternity, and what it meant to be a 'good' mother, abounded in conduct books, fiction, and correspondence in the Romantic period. Julie Kipp claims that 'Romantic authors pervasively questioned the intimate relationship between mothers and their children

[30] Sara Coleridge, 'To John Taylor Coleridge', 26 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 7.3-8.1).

and betrayed persistent fears about the physical as well as spiritual dimensions of the mother-child bond'.[31] This thesis reflects the wide-ranging attitudes towards motherhood in the period by exploring various maternal relationships in Coleridge's and Shelley's body of work.

This thesis reconfigures Shelley's parental relationships by reading her through the lens of child absence. In other words, I read Shelley's short stories for children and travel memoir in relation to her position as a mother and widow. In so doing it seeks to emphasise the significance of the loss of children, as well as the loss of mothers, on Shelley's thought. This in turn offers a new interpretation of the intergenerational structures that existed within the Godwin-Shelley families. It focuses not only on Shelley's relationship with her mother, but also on Shelley's relationships with her children, and how these mother-child bonds are represented in her corpus.

The intergenerational bond between mother and baby likewise emerges in Coleridge's diaries. From 1830 to 1838, Coleridge kept a 'Diary of her Children's Early Years', in which she records her children's development. This included their eating habits, teething, and bowel movements. Coleridge's baby diary has attracted attention because she interweaves her own thoughts and feelings into the narrative, including her sleeplessness, morphine and opium intake, and breastfeeding. As David B. Ruderman suggests, 'Coleridge does not merely insert herself into the narrative of her children's early years. Rather, the children appear as an inseparable part of an unfolding sequence'. Ruderman argues that the baby diary mediates a cross-fertilisation between maternal and child subjectivity, insofar as ''baby,' 'child,' and 'mother' are less and less distinct and separate categories'.[32] His interpretation of the baby

[31] Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 12.
[32] D.B. Ruderman, *The Idea of Infancy in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry: Romanticism, Subjectivity, Form* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 121-122.

diary is useful for the purposes of this thesis as it highlights Coleridge's preoccupation with the relationships between mothers and children. This thesis extends Ruderman's argument to suggest that Coleridge's writings are primarily concerned with intergenerational relics. The baby diary can be understood as an intergenerational relic as it is a material artefact that documents the experiences of mother and child. This thesis locates other intergenerational relics in Coleridge's archive, namely her 'Book of Mourning' (1843-1851).

Both Coleridge and Shelley endured successive pregnancies, miscarriages, and stillbirths. From 1814 to 1822, Shelley was pregnant five times and suffered numerous miscarriages. Only one child, Percy Florence, survived: the others, an unnamed daughter born in 1815, Clara Everina (born 1817), and William (born 1816), died in infancy. Coleridge's eldest children, Herbert and Edith, lived into adulthood, but her twin babies, Berkeley and Florence (born 1834), died mere days after birth, as did her daughter Bertha Fanny (born 1840). Henry Nelson Coleridge reported to Robert Southey in 1838 that Coleridge had given birth to a stillborn child.[33] Coleridge's and Shelley's experiences were far from unusual. As Joanne Bailey notes, '[a]round 30 to 35 per cent of children would die before reaching their tenth birthdays in England and Wales across the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, a mortality rate that only improved from the late nineteenth century'.[34] Death in childbirth—or, at the very least, a traumatic birthing experience—was also relatively common. Shelley suffered a serious miscarriage in the summer of 1822 and had to be placed in an ice bath by Claire and Percy Bysshe Shelley to stem the bleeding. Coleridge likewise experienced difficult pregnancies and suffered from postpartum depression. Hilary Marland has analysed Coleridge's 'puerperal disease', the symptoms of which emerged after Edith's birth in 1832,

[33] Henry Nelson Coleridge, 'To Robert Southey', 11 March 1838. Harry Ransom Center (MS-860, container 2.3).
[34] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 39.

at length.[35] This thesis eschews a medicalised interpretation of pregnancy and childbirth, opting instead to focus on the emotional impact it had on Coleridge and Shelley.

A critical analysis of grief and absence sheds light on nineteenth-century cultural conceptions of motherhood. Both Coleridge and Shelley interrogate 'appropriate' ways to grieve. Shelley's characterisation of Ceres in *Proserpine* aligns maternal grief with rage, insofar as she vows that 'the Earth shall lose/Its proud fertility' should her daughter remain with Pluto in the Underworld.[36] Coleridge, meanwhile, voices maternal guilt for being unable to be an active part in her children's lives and resigns herself to loss and suffering. Hannah Newton argues that resignation informed parents' responses to grief from the Early-Modern period to the late eighteenth century. The theological understanding of parenthood in this period stipulated that all humans belonged to God: hence, when a child died, they were returned to God. Parents were expected to submit to God's will when their child—or indeed, anyone—passed away.[37] Nevertheless, responses to loss were various. The examples of Coleridge and Shelley reflect this emotional range. Coleridge mourned deeply for the loss of loved ones and tried to temper her grief through resignation. By contrast, Shelley's anguish was extreme, thereby challenging the 'emotional restraint' deemed necessary 'to prevent extremes of grief from destroying both mind and body'.[38] This thesis uncovers different responses to and forms of loss through an extensive analysis of Coleridge's and Shelley's writings about maternity and children. In so doing it seeks to illustrate the diversity of maternal grief.

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[35] Hilary Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 86.
[36] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine and Midas: Two Unpublished Mythological Dramas*, ed. by A. Koszul (London: Humphrey Milford, 1922), p. 38.
[37] Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early-Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 149.
[38] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 42.

Philippe Ariès' 'parental indifference hypothesis', which argued that mothers and fathers in the past were apathetic towards the deaths of their offspring, has been both challenged and reinforced by various scholars. In Ariès' view, 'it was thought that the little thing which had disappeared so soon in life was not worthy of remembrance: there were far too many children whose survival was problematical'.[39] The eighteenth century is considered a turning point in the culture of childhood, with sentimentalism identifying the child as a sacred object.[40] Indeed, attitudes towards children and parenting have shifted—and continue to shift—over the centuries. However, while couples tended to have larger families in the past, the deaths of children remained a deeply painful experience. This is evident in the

[39] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 38.
[40] Larry Wolff, 'Childhood and the Enlightenment', in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. by Paula S. Fass (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 78-100 (p. 95).



Figure 2: The Penelope Boothby Monument at St. Oswald's Church, Ashbourne. Author's own photo.



monuments to dead children commissioned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sir Brooke Boothby dedicated a book of twenty-four sonnets to his five-year-old daughter Penelope after her death in 1791: he also commissioned Henry Fuseli to paint a memorial portrait and worked with the sculptor

Thomas Banks on her tomb (see figure 2).[41] The Boothby monument influenced Francis Chantrey's 1817 sculpture at Lichfield Cathedral, 'The Sleeping Children'. Commissioned by Ellen Jane Robinson, the sculpture depicts her two daughters, Marianne and Ellen Jane, sleeping in each other's arms. (Ellen Jane burnt to death after her dress caught fire, while Marianne died of a fever).[42] These public displays of parental grief had affective significance, not only because they reflected the loss of Sir Brooke Boothby and Mrs Robinson, but also because they had a profound impact on visitors. The Boothby monument influenced Lewis Carroll's photographs of Xie Kitchin in the 1870s, while the Chantrey sculpture inspired Felicia Heman's poem, 'The Child's Last Sleep'.[43] This suggests that displays of parental grief had wider cultural and literary reverberations outside of their immediate moment.

Families also expressed grief privately. Although Smith's mourning was made public upon the issuing of her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800), her grief was articulated in private correspondence. When his nine-year-old son Herbert died in 1816, Southey was overcome with sorrow, writing that 'no equal affliction can ever again befall me for here was the very heart & life of ~~xxx~~ my happiness & ~~xxxx~~ my hopes'.[44] For the purposes of this thesis, I uncover responses to child loss in women's writing. I use unpublished and unused manuscripts as evidence of Coleridge's and Shelley's responses to loss.

Shelley reacted acutely to the deaths of her children. At age seventeen, she woke to 'Find my baby dead'.[45] Clara and William Shelley died in 1818 and 1819 respectively. Both

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[41] Robert Woods, *Children Remembered: Responses to Untimely Death in the Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 77.
[42] George T. Noszlopy and Fiona Waterhouse, *Public Sculpture of Staffordshire and the Black Country* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 226-227.
[43] Lindsay Smith, *Lewis Carroll: Photography on the Move* (London: Reakiton Books, 2015), pp. 16-23; Felicia Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2002), pp. 344-345.
[44] Robert Southey, qtd. in Lynda Pratt, 'The 'Entire Man of Letters'? Robert Southey, Correspondence and Romantic Incompleteness', in *Romanticism and the Letter*, ed. by Madeleine Callaghan and Anthony Howe (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 99-116 (p. 102).
[45] Mary Shelley, 6 March 1815, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, I*, 3 vols ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 68.

are immortalised in 'The Choice', an elegy dedicated to those Shelley had lost. 'First my sweet girl', she mourns, 'Slept on bleak Lido, near Venetian seas', while William's 'spoils were strewed beneath the land of Rome/Whose flowers now star the dark earth near his tomb'.[46] Writing to Leigh Hunt in 1821, Shelley notes that she and Percy Bysshe Shelley had enjoyed his essay 'Deaths of Little Children', which suggested that a parent's memories of their deceased child(ren) are 'the prettiest pages that wait upon imagination'.[47] However, while Shelley acknowledged it as a piece of 'fine writing', she observed that 'there is one thing well apparent—You, my dear Hunt, never lost a child or the ideal immortality wd not suffice to your immagination [*sic*] as it naturally does'.[48] This in turn suggests that 'so acute was this form of grief that only parents could grasp its extent', as Bailey notes.[49] I explore Shelley's privileging of parental grief in my analyses of *Maurice* and *Proserpine* in Chapter Three.

Writing to Jane Williams on 5 December 1822, Shelley speaks of their shared loss and imagines that 'God has still one blessing for you & me—the hope—the belief of se[e]ing them again, & may that blessing be as entirely yours as it is mine'.[50] Jane's husband, Edward, had drowned on 8 July with Percy Bysshe Shelley and Charles Vivian, an eighteen-year-old cabin boy. Shelley struggled to be consoled after the deaths of her children. She slipped into a deep depression after William's death in the summer of 1819. As she puts it in an 1819 letter to Marianne Hunt:

> We came to Italy thinking to do Shelley's health good—but the Climate is not any means warm enough to be of benefit to him & yet it is that that has destroyed my two children—We went from England comparatively prosperous

[46] Mary Shelley, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1822, Volume II*, p. 492.
[47] Leigh Hunt, *Essays by Leigh Hunt*, ed. by Arthur Symons (London: Walter Scott, 1887), p. 45.
[48] Mary Shelley, 'To Leigh Hunt', 29 December 1820, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: 1*, p. 170.
[49] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 40.
[50] Mary Shelley, 'To Jane Williams', 5 December 1822, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Volume I*, p. 297.

> & happy—I should return broken hearted & miserable—I never know one moments ease from the wretchedness & despair that possesses me—May you my dear Marianne never know what it is to loose [*sic*] two only & lovely children in one year—to watch their dying moments—& then at last to be left childless & for ever miserable[.][51]

Shelley's emotional state from 1819 onwards has been well rehearsed in critical biographies: she distanced herself from Percy Bysshe Shelley and expressed regret for her apparent 'coldness' after his death by drowning in 1822.[52] More relevant for the purposes of this thesis is how Shelley conceives of loss. The protagonist's claim in *Matilda* (1819) that death 'is one of those adversities which hurt instead of purifying the heart; for it is so intense a misery that it hardens & dulls the feelings' is evident in Shelley's journals and correspondence, which attempt to process the quick succession of infant deaths.[53] So too is it perceptible in Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow', begun after her husband's sudden death, which I analyse in more depth in the next section of this introductory chapter.

Shelley's correspondence with Marianne Hunt in the immediate aftermath of William's death also reveals how she perceived the mother-child bond. In the same letter that I have just quoted, Shelley explains that her children are crucial to her life. 'I feel that I am no[t] fit for any thing & therefore not fit to live', she writes, 'but how must that heart be moulded which would not be broken by what I have suffered':

> William was so good so beautiful so entirely attached to me—To the last moment almost he was in such abounding health & spirits—and his malady appeared of so slight a nature—and as arising simply from worms inspired no

[51] Ibid., 'To Marianne Hunt', 29 June 1819, p. 101.
[52] See Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 264.
[53] Mary Shelley, *Mathilda*, ed. by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2017), p. 114.

> fear of danger that the blow was as sudden as it was terrible—Did you ever know a child with a fine colour—wonderful spirits—breedings [*sic*] worms (and those of the most innocent kind) that would kill him in a fortnight—we had a most excellent English surgeon to attend him and he allowed that these were the fruits of this hateful Italy—[54]

Writing to Amelia Curran—who was sketching out designs for William's tomb in the Protestant Cemetery—she remarks that she 'never shall recover from the blow…Everything on earth has lost its interest to me'.[55] This semi-suicidal rhetoric would be repeated later in Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow'.

Leigh Hunt's observation that Shelley had a 'tendency'—even a 'philosophy'—'to look over-intensely at the dark side of human things' has been explored at length by Eileen Hunt.[56] According to Hunt, '[l]ike a feminine Oedipus, Shelley came to see tragedies—like the serial loss of five children she bore or cared for—as contagions of misfortune'.[57] Aside from Clara and William, two other children within the Shelley circle died. Elena Adelaide, a child adopted by the Shelleys, died while under the care of foster parents in 1820; and Allegra, Claire's daughter by Byron, died of a fever while residing at a convent in 1822, mere months before Percy Bysshe Shelley's drowning at sea. Writing in her 'Journal of Sorrow' in 1839, Shelley refers to 'Poor Harriet to whose sad fate I attribute so many of my own heavy sorrows as the atonement by fate for her death'.[58] This is a reference to Percy Bysshe Shelley's first wife, Harriet Westbrook, who had committed suicide by drowning while pregnant in 1816. Shelley understood the deaths of her husband and children as a form of

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[54] Mary Shelley, 'To Marianne Hunt', 29 June 1819, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I*, p. 102.
[55] Ibid., 'To Amelia Curran', 27 June 1819, p. 100.
[56] Leigh Hunt, qtd. in Eileen M. Hunt, *The First Last Man: Mary Shelley and the Postapocalyptic Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), p. 46.
[57] Eileen M. Hunt, *The First Last Man*, p. 47.
[58] Mary Shelley, 12 February 1839, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844: II,* 3 vols, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 560.

divine retribution. The fact that Shelley alluded to Harriet in her 1839 journal—twenty-two years after Harriet's death—demonstrates how it continued to haunt her.

The death of Allegra Byron was a significant event in the Godwin-Shelley circle. The child had initially been placed with Maria Gisborne before being moved to a convent in Bagnacavallo. Byron denied Claire visiting rights. Writing to Byron in February 1822, Claire lamented, 'I can no longer resist the internal inexplicable feeling which haunts me that I shall never see her any more'.[59] Allegra died two months later, but the Shelleys did not tell Claire until May. Claire usually wrote in her journals regularly and there were few gaps in between dates. However, from 13 April (a week before Allegra's death) to 5th September 1822 her journal remained blank. This absence speaks to the intensity of Claire's grief. It also points to the ways in which the physically absent dead remain present within the shadows of a text. The presence of Allegra is felt in the five-month gap in Claire's journal. The same is also true of Shelley's journals from the time of Percy Bysshe Shelley's death, with a three-month gap between the last entry in her third journal and her first entry in the 'Journal of Sorrow'. This further suggests a relationship between textual and physical absence. In some cases, the physical presence of the dead is resurrected through the act of reading and writing: this is evident in Shelley's reading of Wollstonecraft and later biographical management of Percy Bysshe Shelley, which I detail more in section 4 of this introductory chapter. However, the dead also remain present even when they are not specifically referred to. This in turn points to different forms of absence.

The Coleridge family were likewise affected by the deaths of children. Hartley and Henry Nelson Coleridge and penned two elegies to Berkeley and Florence, entitled 'Twins' and 'On Berkeley and Florence Coleridge, Who Died on the 16th of January, 1834'

[59] Claire Clairmont, qtd. in Andrew Stauffer, *Byron: A Life in Ten Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), p. 257.

respectively. As per the theological understanding of parenthood at the time, the twins are presented as frail little beings 'straight required by Heaven'.[60] I discuss these poems in more detail in Chapter One. To my knowledge, Coleridge did not write a poem on the twins' loss. This is not to say that Coleridge was indifferent towards them: in a previously unpublished letter to Henry Nelson Coleridge sent from Ilchester, Coleridge notes that she is 'literally as weak as the first fortnight after the birth of the twins. I do not weep as I did then'.[61] For the purposes of this introductory chapter, I will explore Coleridge's response to the death of another child: Bertha Fanny.

The Coleridge family archive at the Harry Ransom Center contains a manuscript titled 'Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death', dated July 1840. The journal begins on 25 July, the day after Bertha died. Coleridge relates that 'Dear Baby after a long deep sleep about 12 o clock woke in a sort of fit': they immediately sent for Derwent's chief curate to baptise the child. She continues:

> In the morning about 10 or 11 Henry who had been watching during the night came in saying 'She is gone!' but again she rallied—I saw her about 11 in the morning. She was shrunk & looked blue—but ever & anon opened or half opened her eyes which were large bright & dark—of some indefinite dark colour a greenish grayish tint presiding in them more than brown—but when wide open they seemed rich & dark & even purplishly. ^like purple violets with dew upon them in the sunshine^. […] Between 7 & 8 Henry said she was losing heat. At 8 o clock I heard him sob hysterically & knew that she was dying. In about 10 minutes Ann [Parrott, the family nurse] told me she had given her last sigh. As Henry said she died away like a breeze. ^and so—thus

[60] Henry Nelson Coleridge, in *The Poetical Works of S.T. Coleridge*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1834), p. 149 (ln. 4).
[61] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 21 October 1836. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 6.5-7.2).

> faintly faintly tied/To earth—she was set free and died. Pain—the appanage of earth could gain no firm grasp of one so faintly faintly tied to it.^[62]

Coleridge's account of Bertha's dying moments—including the blue tint that appeared on her skin—is typical of her records of death overall. As I suggest in Chapter Two, Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' dwells on the physicality of death. Yet the 'Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death' also elucidates the theological underpinnings of consolation. Coleridge references Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone; Or The Fate of the Nortons* (1815), which tells the story of Emily Norton, who loses her family after an unsuccessful rebellion during the reign of Elizabeth I. At the end of the poem, 'thus faintly faintly tied/To earth, she was set free, and died'.[63] Coleridge refers to these lines in her attempt to resign to God's will. This is further reinforced by Henry Nelson Coleridge's comment that Bertha 'died away like a breeze'. In sum, Coleridge compensates for Bertha's suffering by imagining her spiritual release in the afterlife. I argue in Chapter Two that Coleridge's dual recognition of the materiality of death and the immateriality of the soul informs her writings about familial loss.

Coleridge wrote about Bertha Fanny in letters to her friend Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones, who was elected as the child's godmother. One previously unpublished letter reveals that the family looked forward to the birth, especially as Coleridge's other children would have a little sister to dote on:

> Our sweet little Bertha Fanny, for she was sweet to us,—a precious object of many fond thoughts, and hopes by which love is nourished,—promised to be less like our other children than they are to each other. We fancied that in complexion she would perhaps resemble the dear aunt Fanny [Duke Patteson,

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[62] Sara Coleridge, 'Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death', July 1840. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.5).
[63] William Wordsworth, in *The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth Series, II*, 3 vols, ed. by Jared Curtis (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009), p. 630 (lns.1883-1884).

> Henry Nelson Coleridge's sister] whose name she bore—you may imagine what visions we had of this third darling—of what she was to be in various stages of her babyhood—& childhood & girlhood—how we connected her with Edith & imagined what the elder & younger sister would be to each other, & how prettily they would contrast with each other. Her fate is a happier one than we could have dreamed out—or by our best parental efforts—have secured for her, and we shall be no losers by the sacrifice if we suffer it willingly. Miss Park [a neighbour] will perhaps hear of our loss with a regretful interest.[64]

To my knowledge, Coleridge wrote more letters about Bertha Fanny than she did the twins. Reading through her correspondence from the time of Bertha Fanny's death, it becomes apparent that she and her husband had hoped for a child to accompany them in their middle age. The parents imagined her similarities and differences to Edith; the stages of her 'girlhood' and which family member she would resemble. Coleridge's remark that her daughter's fate is 'a happier one' than they could have hoped for is not a sign of maternal apathy. Rather, it is consistent with Coleridge's expressions of religious consolation.

The arrival of Coleridge's niece, Christabel Rose, in May 1843 triggered memories of Bertha Fanny. Writing to her sister-in-law Mary to congratulate her on the birth, Coleridge notes that 'My feelings about my little Bertha Fanny, which I once thought dead—I now find to have been only dormant. I have thought much of her and felt much, since the arrival of Christabel Rose'.[65] In another previously unpublished letter to Mrs Frederick Denison Maurice, who had also recently given birth, Coleridge writes:

[64] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones', July 1840. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 10.4-5).
[65] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mary Pridham', 28 July 1843. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 8.3-9.4).

> I hope your baby will thrive as my sister Mary's appears to have done. The little Christabel is indeed a sweet fatling, sleek as the sleekest of calves that ever was served up at a merry-making. She makes me sigh again for my poor little Bertha, who was taken from me so soon after she had been given, contrary to all expectation; for her seeing the light was more than I had dared to hope beforehand. I think of her now with fresh regret. But these lookings back are unwise. I must try to look onward & upward;—beyond the grave, not into it.[66]

Coleridge's reminiscences about Bertha Fanny highlight her struggle to reconcile the death of her infant with God's will. Moreover, it sheds light on the idea of absent presences, insofar as Bertha is present in another stratum of existence. This is suggested by Coleridge's determination to look 'beyond the grave, not into it'. There is an assumption within death studies that grieving became a more secular process from the eighteenth century onwards. According to Bailey, '[s]ome secularisation of language occurred, with a shift in focus to the family's own handling of their grief'.[67] Coleridge's correspondence and diaries show that, while the family was at the epicentre of the grieving process, religion still influenced their responses to death. In its analysis of Coleridge's writings, then, this thesis reassesses the seemingly waning influence of Christianity on nineteenth-century mourning culture.

The serial infant deaths that both Coleridge and Shelley endured sheds light on the personal resonance of loss in their writings. Their personal correspondence shows how they responded to the deaths of their children, with Coleridge expressing a sense of resignation that is absent in Shelley's letters. This in turn points to the existence of different forms and

[66] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mrs Frederick Denison Maurice', Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.10).
[67] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 40.

ways of communicating grief in nineteenth-century literature. The next section of this introductory chapter turns to Coleridge's and Shelley's experience as widowed mothers.

Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley as Widows

As well as suffering the deaths of their children and mothers, Coleridge and Shelley also endured the loss of their partners. I have referred previously to two artefacts, Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' and Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow'. Although different in form, content, and intent, these artefacts shed light on Coleridge's and Shelley's conceptions of and responses to loss. Both artefacts begin with the deaths of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley. While this thesis is concerned with maternal relationships, Coleridge's and Shelley's experiences as widows evidence their relational roles as mother and wife.

Both Coleridge and Shelley were widowed young. Shelley was widowed at the age of twenty-five; Coleridge was widowed at the age of forty. The death of Percy Bysshe Shelley was unexpected. Shelley provides an account of the weeks leading up to the 'fateful day' in a lengthy epistle to Maria Gisborne. By contrast, Henry Nelson Coleridge's death was expected: he had been bedbound for approximately nine months on account of spinal paralysis, and his condition in the final week of his life suggested that death was near. In the years following the deaths of their husbands, Coleridge and Shelley present themselves as widowed mothers. For the purposes of this section, I will analyse Coleridge's and Shelley's expressions of grief, before turning to their negotiation of marital and maternal identities.

In her study of Victorian mourning practices, Jalland notes that many widows 'searched for their lost husbands, the attempt to locate them in favourite chairs, and the illusions that they had seen or heard them'.[68] This emerges in Shelley's essay 'On Ghosts' (1824), which reflects on the recent loss of a 'friend'. In one scene, Shelley walks through an

[68] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 233.

empty house connected by association to the deceased. This leads her to meditate the nature of grief and death:

> I walked through the rooms filled with sensations of the most poignant grief. He had been there; his living frame had been caged by those walls, his breath had mingled with that atmosphere, his step had been on those stones, I thought:—the earth is a tomb, the gaudy sky a vault, we but walking corpses.[69]

As Angela Wright observes, the physical absence of this loved one facilitates a 'morbid transformation' of the house he lived in.[70] In other words, it is through this friend's absence that Shelley can establish his presence. The issue of haunting is pervasive in Shelley's correspondence in the years following her husband's death. Writing to Edward Trelawny in 1824, she wonders, 'Am I indeed Mary Shelley? the Mary Shelley who gave you almond billêt doux during our Pisan regales? and who [almost forgot] erred into wildness, untamed as she was by any sorrow? –Mary Shelley now is but a ghost of that'.[71] This suggests that Shelley conceived herself as barely living, occupying a liminal position between life and death. As such, Shelley is not only haunted by the presence of her deceased partner: she also haunts 'land of the living', a phrase she uses to describe the 'others' from whom she is exiled.[72]

The presence of the dead is felt in Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow', which was begun shortly after the death of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's correspondence and journals from this period reveal the depth of her grief. While the 'Journal of Sorrow' has been read as a

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[69] Mary Shelley, in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. by E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 282.
[70] Angela Wright, ''The house of misery': Space and Memory in the Later Correspondence and Literature of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley', in *Romanticism and the Letter*, ed. by Madeleine Callaghan and Anthony Howe (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 253-268 (p. 264).
[71] Mary Shelley, 'To Edward John Trelawny', 22 March 1824, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I*, p. 415.
[72] Mary Shelley, 'To Edward John Trelawny', 22 March 1824, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I*, p. 415.

memorial to the deceased Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley reflects on the deaths of others—notably her children, William and Clara, as well as Lord Byron, who died in 1824. For instance, in a journal entry dated a month after Byron's death, Shelley writes:

> What do I do here? Why ~~and~~ am I doomed to live on seeing all those expire before me? God grant I may die young—A new race is springing about me—At the age of twenty six I am in the condition of an aged person—all my old friends are gone—I have no wish to form new—I cling to the few remaining—but they slide away and my heart fails when I think by how few ties I hold to the world—Able [Lord Byron], dearest Albe, was knit by long associations—Each day I repeat with bitter feelings 'Life is the desart and the solitude—how populous the grave.'[73]

The entries from the time of Byron's death—in which Shelley describes herself as the 'last man' of their coterie—have been read within the context of her novel *The Last Man* (1826), which follows its protagonist Lionel Verney as he witnesses the deaths of his family and the entire human race when a plague ravages the globe. More relevant for the purposes of this thesis is how Shelley conceives of the bond between the living and the dead.[74] This is perceptible in her choice to paraphrase lines from Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts* (1742-45): 'This is the desert, this the solitude:/How populous, how vital is the grave!'[75] These lines suggest that one's 'true' home is in the afterlife, where the vastness of death outweighs the solitariness of mortality. This articulation of death as a place of belonging emerges throughout Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow', which ruminates on her own sense of lastness.

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[73] Mary Shelley, 15 May 1824, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* p. 478.
[74] Ibid., 14 May 1824, p. 476.
[75] Edward Young, *Edward Young: Selected Poems*, ed. by Brian Hepworth (Cheadle: Fyfield Books, 1975), p. 68.

Coleridge likewise positions herself as one of the last relics within her family. This line of thought is evident in her 'Book of Mourning', which consists of two exercise books. The first entry dates to the 17th January 1843, just over a week before the death of Henry Nelson Coleridge. Coleridge records how Herbert had come to visit his father in the sickroom before departing for Eton. Henry Nelson Coleridge's brothers, James and Edward, were also present and performed the last rites. In this way the 'Book of Mourning' differs from Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow' in that Coleridge was present at the death of her husband. Nevertheless, Coleridge's death book resembles Shelley's journal insofar as she speculates—at times even invites—the prospect of her own death. For instance, in an entry dated 26 January 1843, the day of her husband's death, Coleridge writes:

> I must finish my journey alone—40 years are gone—The first 20 years—all is gone that made it charm of that time—The many friends of that period swept away! Now the partner of my heart for 20 years my dear husband for 13 years last September is departed—I was 40 years old this Christmas. Perhaps I may live another 20 years or more may that be a holier & heavenlier life, as much more so than the past as it will be less attended with earthly pleasures & gratifications.[76]

The death of her husband impels Coleridge to think about the past. A year earlier, Henry Nelson Coleridge's sister, Fanny, had died. These deaths motivate Coleridge to lead a 'holier life', suggesting that the grieving process is a prerequisite for the purification of the soul. This sense of resignation is largely absent in Shelley's journal entries from the time of Percy Bysshe Shelley's death, although she does promise to live 'better' for the sake of Percy Florence. The passages relating to the deaths of Percy Bysshe Shelley in the 'Journal of

[76] Sara Coleridge, 'Book Mourning', 26 January 1843. Harry Ransom Center.

Sorrow' and Henry Nelson Coleridge in the 'Book of Mourning' indicate that Coleridge's and Shelley's maternal identities were bound up with their identities as wife and widow.

Coleridge's and Shelley's temptations to join the dead are countered by the presence of their children. There are numerous references to Percy Florence throughout the 'Journal of Sorrow', spanning from his infancy to his admittance at Trinity College, Cambridge. The inside cover of the journal reads, 'Journal of Sorrow—/Begun 1822/But for my Child it could not/End too soon'.[77] Shelley's inscription here signals not only the journal's association with the death and memory of Percy Bysshe Shelley; it also identifies Percy Florence as a crucial presence in her life. These sentiments are repeated in a journal entry dated 21st October 1822, in which Shelley writes that '[s]ince my child not only forces me to live, but debars me from the utter solitude in which I would fain immure myself, I must endeavour to change this mood of mine'.[78] Coleridge similarly presents her children as a barrier to death. In a previously unpublished letter written shortly after Sarah Fricker Coleridge's death, Coleridge tells Isabella Fenwick that, 'Yesterday we laid her in the grave beside my father & husband…I feel a longing to join those that are gone but my children will want me for some years to come. But for them I could well be spared now—'.[79] This belief in the vitality of her children recurs in her last known correspondence, written mere weeks before her death from breast cancer. In her last known letter to Derwent, Coleridge writes, 'I am <u>much</u> worse today than ever before. Oh my dear children! Must I leave you so soon! God's will be done!'[80] I argue in Chapter One that while the prospect of mother-child separation was always painful to Coleridge, her 1830s poems imagine a scenario in which death will force her to leave them behind. In the final weeks of her life, this prospect of separation became a reality. Throughout

[77] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* p. 428.
[78] Ibid., 21 October 1822, p. 441.
[79] Sara Coleridge, 'To Isabella Fenwick', 1 October 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-08666, container 10.2-3).
[80] Sara Coleridge, 'To Derwent Coleridge', April 1852. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 5.1-5.3).

their correspondence and journals, Shelley and Coleridge oscillate between welcoming death and coveting the presence of their living children.

Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' and Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow' are records of absent presences. The first half of the 'Book of Mourning' and 'Journal of Sorrow' grapple with the absence of deceased husbands. Yet as the pages progress, both Coleridge and Shelley reflect on their necessary presence in their children's lives. By the same token, the presence of their children is crucial to them. This in turn points to the ways in which both marital and maternal relationships informed Coleridge's and Shelley's understanding of loss.

Coleridge and Shelley participated in mourning culture. As well as keeping textual relics associated with the deceased—such as the 'Journal of Sorrow' and 'Book of Mourning'—they also preserved material relics like hair. In her study of death in eighteenth-century fiction, Jolene Zigoravich observes that 'the body's solidity and preservation become increasingly important in this period as notions of self center on theories of the tactile and material'.[81] The rise of individualism was manifested in the growing trend of preserving human relics. Shelley kept locks of Percy Bysshe Shelley's hair as well as one of his organs. In her account of Henry Nelson Coleridge's corpse in the 'Book of Mourning', Coleridge notes that she 'cut locks of hair off the beloved head and breast'.[82] She cut and preserved some of Henry Nelson Coleridge's nipple hair and placed it in a mourning envelope (see figure 3).[83] The textual and material remains associated with Percy Bysshe Shelley and Henry Nelson Coleridge are prime examples of nineteenth-century relic culture, which 'expressed a willingness to dwell with loss itself, to linger over the evidence of death's

[81] Jolene Zigarovich, *Death and the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023) p. 10.
[82] Sara Coleridge, 'Book of Mourning', 26 January 1843. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.1).
[83] Henry Nelson Coleridge, 'Hair with handwritten identification', January 1843. Harry Ransom Center (Coleridge Family Manuscripts).

presence woven into the texture of life'.[84] This notion of the absent presence, what Lutz terms the 'aura' of the deceased, is explored throughout this thesis.[85]

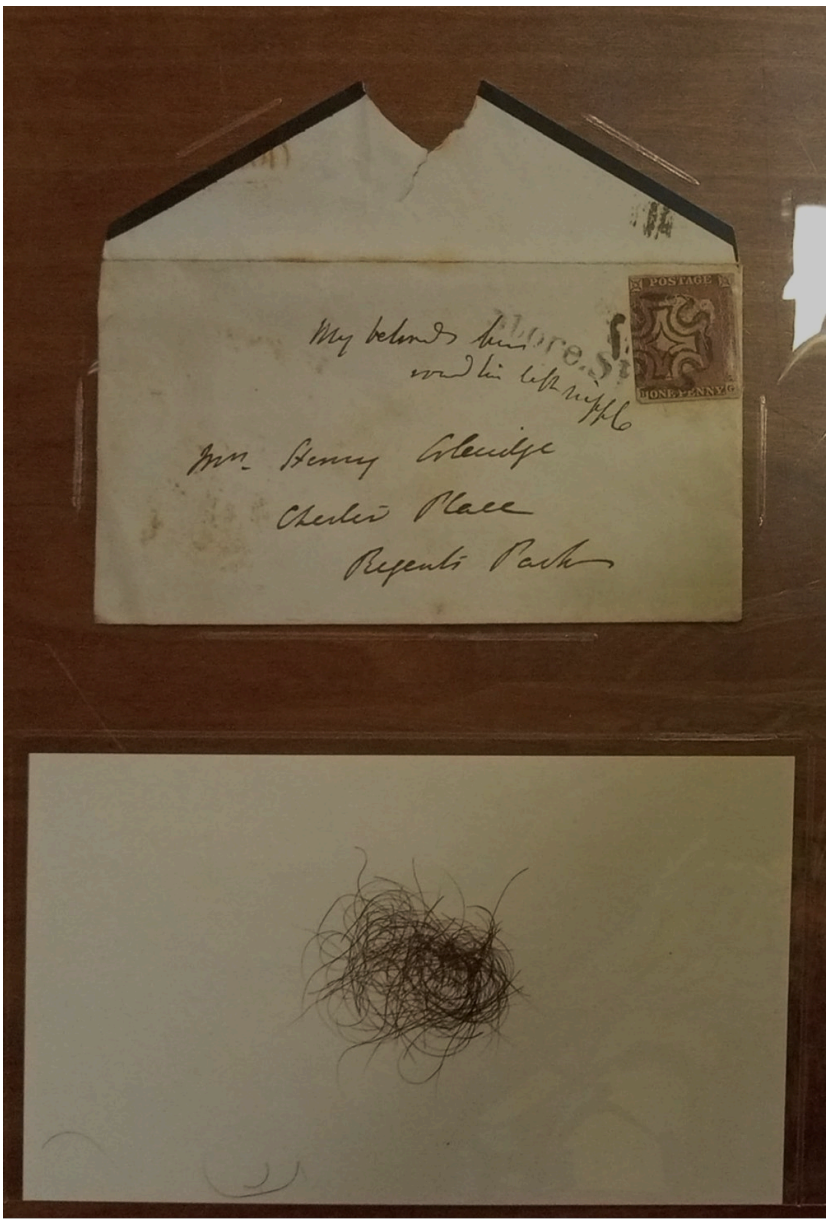


Figure 3: Henry Nelson Coleridge's nipple hair (January 1843). Reproduced with permission from the Harry Ransom Center.

The inscription on the envelope reads 'my beloveds hair round his left nipple/Mrs. Henry Coleridge Chester Place Regents Park'.

The next section of this introductory chapter considers how Coleridge and Shelley present themselves as mothers, daughters, and widows in their biographical output. It will trace a rhetoric of loss in their editorial curation of their fathers' and husband's bodies of

[84] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 8.
[85] Ibid., p. 7.

work. In so doing it seeks to show the ways in which loss permeated the different genres in which Coleridge and Shelley wrote.

Sara Coleridge and Mary Shelley as Biographers

The rhetoric of memorialisation is perceptible not only in Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' and Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow'; it is also evident in their approach to biography. From the 1830s until her death in 1852, Coleridge oversaw the editorial arrangement of her father's corpus. Until 1843 this was a collaborative endeavour with her husband, and in her later years she worked with Derwent to produce new editions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's works. From 1824 to the 1840s Shelley arranged Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems for publication. She encountered barriers to her plans when her father-in-law threatened to disinherit her son should she bring Percy Bysshe Shelley's name before the public again. The impact that Coleridge's and Shelley's editorial decisions had on their husband's and father's posthumous legacies is well rehearsed in scholarship. For the purposes of this introductory chapter, I seek to demonstrate how their participation in nineteenth-century biographical culture sheds light on their curation of loss. By 'curation of loss' I mean the ways in which Coleridge and Shelley catalogue the absence of loved ones.

Historians of nineteenth-century biography agree that the genre conflates corpse and corpus. Samantha Matthews' *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (2004) explores the dual meaning of 'literary remains' as both a textual and corporeal artefact. In Matthews' view, 'the book functioned as a substitute for and transformed incarnation of the poet's body, and in some cases through biography tied the work to the decayed authorial body itself, sending readers back to the site of mortal remains'.[86] This is evident in William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), in which

[86] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

Godwin proposes that the burial sites of notable figures should be marked with a wooden cross. On Milton's burial site, Godwin argues that 'I am not contented to visit the house in Bread-Street where Milton was born…I want to repair to the place where *he now dwells*…I wish to live in intercourse with the Illustrious Dead of All Ages'.[87] Godwin implies here that the dead remain present through textual relics capable of evoking poetic insight. This thesis extends Matthews' articulation of the book-as-body by suggesting that Coleridge and Shelley envision their works as intergenerational relics. In so doing this thesis explores issues concerning legacy, memorialisation, and presence within the context of familial relationships.

Julian North's *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (2009) argues that nineteenth-century biography aimed to 'domesticate' literary 'geniuses' by emphasizing the connection between the 'public/historical' and 'private/domestic' spheres.[88] In other words, those closest to them—spouses, family members, friends—were a formative influence on their posthumous legacies. The Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley families are prime examples of what I term intergenerational editing. By this I mean that the task of arranging, editing, and publishing manuscripts was often left to family members. This thesis is informed by the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley families' intergenerational editing. A survey of their editorial practices sheds light on the themes of parental and marital legacies addressed in this thesis.

In his will Godwin-Shelley to 'the goodness to look over the manuscripts that shall be found in my own hand writing, & decide which of them are fit to be printed, consigning the rest to the flames'.[89] Godwin himself was interested in the genre: in 1798 he published his *Memoir of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and later produced several

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[87] William Godwin, *Essay on Sepulchres: Or, A Proposal for Erecting Some Memorial of the Illustrious Dead in All Ages on the Spot Where Their Remains Have Been Interred* (London: W. Miller, 1809), p. 77.
[88] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.
[89] William Godwin, qtd. in *Mary Shelley's* Literary Lives *and Other Writings,* 7 vols, ed. by Pamela Clemit and A.A. Markley (Routledge: New York, 2002), p. xiii.

biographies of historical figures for the Juvenile Library, the children's bookselling business that he and Mary Jane Godwin founded in 1805. The contents of his will, which names Shelley as its primary executor, suggests that Godwin wished for his daughter to impart his posthumous legacy through biography. Shelley began Godwin's memoir in 1836, recommencing intermittently until 1840, at which point she abandoned it for good.[90] In her correspondence with friends, Shelley explains that although she wished to honour her father's desire for 'posthumous fame', her own reputation—as well as that of her son, who was about to enter university—could be threatened by public slander were she to bring out a memoir.[91]

The personalized aspect of biography also meant that Godwin's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's relationships with their spouses would be scrutinized. Shelley was reticent to broach the subject of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's relationship in print: after all, the frankness with which Godwin had detailed Wollstonecraft's sexual history in the 1798 *Memoir* had caused public outcry.[92] Coleridge took issue with Joseph Cottle's and Thomas de Quincey's unauthorised exposés of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which had publicised his substance abuse and separation from Sarah Fricker Coleridge. Writing to Henry Nelson Coleridge in September 1834, Coleridge expresses anger at de Quincey's representation of her mother:

> The impression which the account of my mother would leave is that she is a mean-minded unamiable woman with some respectable qualities and that my Father married her from opportunity rather than much attraction of hers. My mother's *respectability* it did not rest with him to establish: her attractions he

[90] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 150.
[91] See Mary Shelley, 'To Edward John Trelawny', 26 January 1837, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, II*, pp. 280-281.
[92] See Mark Philp, 'Introduction', in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* by William Godwin, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xxix.

> greatly under-rates and the better points of her temper and understanding are not apparent in his partial sketch.[93]

As I have mentioned previously, both Coleridge and Shelley were deeply attached to the memory of their mothers. Read within this context, Coleridge's and Shelley's biographies of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Godwin are just as much about their mothers.

Marital relationships are just as important as parental ones in Coleridge's and Shelley's editorial careers. Percy Bysshe Shelley and Henry Nelson Coleridge collaborated with their wives. Anna Mercer's analysis of Shelley's role as 'posthumous editor' is particularly illuminating for the purposes of this introductory chapter as it reveals the significance of the dead in Shelley's editorial output. That 'the posthumous works of PBS [Percy Bysshe Shelley] are published and edited by his long-term collaborator indicates a continuation of a collaborative intertextuality, as the Shelleys' individual works are repeatedly—almost constantly—shaped by their literary relationship'.[94] In other words, Shelley maintains communication with her deceased husband through the act of editing his manuscripts for publication. This can be applied to Coleridge's editorial career too. Until 1843 she collaborated with her husband on the arrangement of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems and essays; after Henry Nelson Coleridge's death, Coleridge continued to edit and publish her father's work with Derwent. Although Coleridge did not edit and publish her husband's papers, that she identifies herself as his 'widow' in the post-1843 editions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's works indicates a degree of posthumous collaboration, an idea I will take forward later in this section.

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[93] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 20 September 1834, qtd. in *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter: Her Life and Essays* by Bradford Keyes Mudge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 74.
[94] Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 154.

In her analysis of Shelley's arrangement of her husband's *Posthumous Poems* (1824) and *Poetical Works* (1839), North suggests that 'her editorial work should be seen as part of her understanding of biography as the reconstitution of the physical presence of the dead'.[95] Shelley praised Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (1830) as it made her feel that she 'live[d] with him [Byron] again in these pages'.[96] This figurative resurrection of the dead is not specific to biography. Hunt argues that the 'Journal of Sorrow' functions as 'a kind of séance' with the dead Percy Bysshe Shelley.[97] This is suggested in Shelley's entry from 1823, in which Shelley notes, 'I heard My Shelley call me'.[98] This ability to evoke the presence of absent loved ones through writing arises in the texts analysed throughout this thesis. Chapter Three proposes that Shelley uses the art of storytelling to facilitate the reunion between lost child and parent in *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. Chapter Four builds upon this idea by arguing that Shelley reconstitutes the memory of her dead husband and children in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*.

Juliette Atkinson claims that nineteenth-century authors 'envisaged biography as a genre than can heal rifts between the individual and the community'.[99] However, as Turner points out, the Coleridge and Godwin children also 'used biography as an interrogative form to open up spaces between parents and children'.[100] Turner reads this generational shift as a move to 'rewrite' rather than 'rehabilitate' author's lives.[101] This is suggested in Shelley's portrayal of her husband as a 'pure-minded and exalted being' in the 1839 *Poetical Works* and in the Coleridges' plan to create a 'smooth-faced monument' to Samuel Taylor Coleridge

[95] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius*, p. 118.
[96] Mary Shelley, 'To John Murray', in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, II*, p. 101.
[97] Eileen M. Hunt, *Artificial Life After* Frankenstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), p. 133.
[98] Mary Shelley, 17 February 1823, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 451.
[99] Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 12.
[100] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 36.
[101] Ibid.

in the wake of Cottle's and De Quincey's unauthorised biographies.[102] This thesis builds upon the arguments put forth by Atkinson and Turner by exploring the intergenerational structures that underpin Shelley's and Coleridge's writings. Specifically, it explores how these intergenerational ties are mediated by loss.

Coleridge's participation in biographical culture resembles Shelley's textual communication with her mother. By this I mean that just as Shelley compensates for her mother's early death by evoking her memory through reading and writing, so too does Coleridge communicate with her physically absent father through his works. As Robin Schofield claims, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'fragmentary remains represent a history of loss, personal and literary'.[103] In Schofield's view, Coleridge seeks to rectify the 'incompletion' of her family unit by collating her father's *oeuvre* for publication.[104] Alan Vardy comes to a similar conclusion in his extensive study of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's posthumous reputation, arguing that Coleridge's editorial labours 'became the means by which she came to know and sympathize with her father'.[105] Her editorial labours can therefore be understood as an intergenerational relic, insofar as it mediates a posthumous form of familiarity between deceased father and living daughter.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's absence was not the only loss that Coleridge had to contend with. In the 'Advertisement' to the 1847 edition of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge notes that 'the task has been interesting, though full of affecting remembrances, and brought upon me by the deepest sorrow of my life'.[106] The 1847 *Biographia Literaria*

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[102] Mary Shelley, 'Preface', in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Including Various Additional Pieces from MS. And Other Sources*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Edward Moxon, 1870), p. xxiii; Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 110.
[103] Robin Schofield, *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion* (Cham: Springer, 2018), p. 232.
[104] Ibid., p. 232.
[105] Alan D. Vardy, *Constructing Coleridge: The Posthumous Life of the Author* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 102.
[106] Sara Coleridge, 'Advertisement' in *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, *I*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sara Coleridge, 2nd edn (London: William Pickering, 1847), p. ii.

was begun by Henry Nelson Coleridge, who had died in 1843; two years later, Coleridge's mother died also. As well as identifying herself as the daughter of a poet, Coleridge also presents herself as a respectable widow, as the title page makes evident:

SECOND EDITION PREPARED FOR IN PART
BY THE LATE HENRY NELSON COLERIDGE
COMPLETED AND PUBLISHED
BY HIS WIDOW

Jeffrey Barbeau suggests that 'Henry's death theoretically created space for Sara to publish independently, but she insisted on attaching herself to his memory'.[107] In this way, Coleridge subscribes to the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity, which valued women who were 'self-effacing, gentle, reasonable, and domestic'.[108] Coleridge's wilful underestimation of her editorship certainly contributed to her sense of authorial identity, insofar as she identified as Henry's widow. Nonetheless, I would argue that there is another way to interpret this inscription. It suggests that, as Schofield points out, Coleridge's editorial career was marked by loss. Furthermore, it points to Coleridge's relational roles as daughter and wife. Although she does not reference her mother's death in the *Biographia Literaria*, it occurred in the period in which she was arranging the manuscript for publication. Writing to The Honourable Theodosia Alice Taylor in 1845, Coleridge reassures her friend that she is not 'brooding over grief from want of employment'; in fact, she was '*absurdly* busy' editing 'my father's fragmentary work'.[109] Her editorial curation of her father's work in the 1840s therefore speaks to more than one loss.

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[107] Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 83.
[108] Adriana Craciun, 'The Subject of Violence: Mary Lamb, Femme Fatale', in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. by Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 46-70 (p. 49).
[109] Sara Coleridge, 'To the Hon. Mrs Henry Taylor', 8 December 1845, in *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge, I*, 2 vols, ed. by Edith Coleridge (London: Henry S. King, 1873), p. 346.

Coleridge's and Shelley's roles as biographers reveals the ways in which they conceived of absent presences. For both, biography was a form which had the potential to communicate with absent loved ones, such as husbands and fathers. Their mothers also figure as absent presences insofar as they are not explicitly referred to in the biographies for fear of inviting public slander. This in turn points to the intergenerational function of biography, as it negotiates different familial relationships.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. Chapters One and Two are devoted to Sara Coleridge while Chapters Three to Four are dedicated to Mary Shelley. Each chapter focuses on a different genre. Chapter One examines poems addressed to and for children; Chapter Two analyses a fantasy novel; Chapter Three interrogates short stories for children; and Chapter Four looks at a travel memoir. This range in genre reflects the variety with which Coleridge and Shelley approached themes of loss.

Chapter One traces a rhetoric of self-mourning in Coleridge's 1830s poems to and for children. By self-mourning I mean the ways in which Coleridge mourns her inability to perform her maternal duties. It explores a group of relatively understudied poems: 'Benoni. Dedication', To Herbert Coleridge. Feb 13 1834', 'Written in my Illness at Hampstead during Edith's Infancy', 'Sara Coleridge for Herbert and Edith. April 19th 1834', and 'Verses written in sickness 1833, before the Birth of Berkeley and Florence'. Apart from 'Benoni', which was published in Coleridge's *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children* (1834), the poems remained unpublished in Coleridge's lifetime. I argue that Coleridge uses the rhetoric of self-mourning in these poems to speculate her potential future absence in her children's lives. This chapter reads Coleridge's 'legacy' not within the context of a reading public, but within the context of the intergenerational dynamics of her household. In other words, this chapter is

interested in how Coleridge thought she would be read by her family. By so doing this chapter reconfigures Lucy Newlyn's articulation of the 'anxiety of reception', defined as '[a]nxieties experienced by writers [that] centre as much on the future as on the past', by considering how Coleridge positions herself as an absent mother.[110] To support my argument, I use Early-Modern studies of 'mother's legacies', a genre in which a dying mother would transmit spiritual guidance to her husband and children from beyond the grave. This chapter is also informed by the maternal elegies of Sarah Fricker Coleridge, who penned two poems on the death of her infant son, Berkeley (d. 1798). It traces personal and thematic resonances between Coleridge's poems of self-mourning, Early-Modern 'mother's legacies', and Fricker's maternal elegies. In so doing it seeks to highlight the different forms of loss that emerge in Coleridge's 1830s poems to and for children.

Chapter Two examines the narrative of (un)dead mothers and putrefaction in Coleridge's fantasy novel, *Phantasmion*. Within the context of this chapter, '(un)dead' refers to mothers who die only to return in a different form. Building upon my idea of intergenerational relics, this chapter uncovers the ways in which mother-child relationships coalesce around loss in *Phantasmion*. I argue that Coleridge uses the materiality of death as a means of interrogating maternal absence and the nature of loss. It examines four episodes in the novel: Princess Iarine's dialogue on death; the death of Phantasmion's mother, Queen Zalia; the return of Queen Zalia in spirit form; and the death of Princess Iarine's mother Queen Anthemmina, who dies of starvation shortly after reuniting with her daughter. This chapter is informed by scholarship on nineteenth-century burial reform, especially Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs* (1810), which advocates the use of rural churchyards. I suggest that, like Wordsworth, Coleridge conceives of the burial site as a medium of communication between the living and the dead. It also uses previously unpublished excerpts

[110] Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. vii.

from Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' as evidence of Coleridge's understanding of the materiality of death. I refer to her descriptions of the corpses of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge in particular, as they reveal how Coleridge perceived the materiality of death and the immateriality of the divine. I use these different sources to argue that for Coleridge, the dead were never truly 'dead' but remained present in another stratum of existence.

Chapter Three interrogates how Mary Shelley uses storytelling to recover lost children in her short stories for children, *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. By this I mean that Proserpine's and Maurice's parents locate their lost children by piecing together the stories told by other characters whom they meet during their search. It looks at different forms of motherlessness and childlessness: lost children; lost daughters; parents who lose children; and parents who want children. I argue that the story of a lost child had personal resonance for Shelley, whose son William died in the year preceding the composition of *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. This chapter also uncovers Shelley's intergenerational friendship with Margaret King Moore, who had lost custody of her children after eloping with George Tighe and whose illegitimate daughter, Laurette, was the recipient of Shelley's stories. I also trace similarities between Proserpine, Matilda, Beatrice Cenci, and Maria of *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), all of whom are sexually lost (i.e., raped). Moreover, it traces affinities between Shelley's short stories for children and some of the books published with the Juvenile Library, namely Eliza Fenwick's *Visits to the Juvenile Library* (1805), which focuses on a woman's search for her kidnapped daughter. Although this chapter does not look at death specifically, it identifies a rhetoric of mourning in *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. In addition, it understands storytelling as an intergenerational relic, insofar as it facilitates a reunion between parents and children.

Chapter Four analyses Shelley's self-fashioning as a widowed mother in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, which documents Shelley's return to the continent after two decades.

Building upon my discussion of Shelley's role as biographer, this chapter uncovers the presence of the deceased Percy Bysshe Shelley, William, and Clara, as well as the living Percy Florence. In so doing it seeks to highlight the multiplicity of Shelley's persona as the widow of a dead poet and mother to both dead and living children. My evaluation of the bond between Shelley and Percy Florence is informed by Wollstonecraft's travel memoir, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), in which Fanny Imlay becomes a symbol of Wollstonecraft's future after the breakdown of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay. This chapter locates the imagery of suffering maternity elsewhere in *Rambles*, namely in Shelley's descriptions of art. Through an analysis of Shelley's accounts of the Niobe and Virgin Mary monuments, this chapter argues that Shelley resonated with art's capacity to express maternal loss.

Using papers by Jane, Lady Shelley and Edith Coleridge, the conclusion explores how maternal legacies continued into the next generation. Jane was deeply interested in spiritualism and attempted to contact the spirit of Mary Shelley to seek approval for her editorial projects. Edith too memorialised her mother. After Sara Coleridge's death in 1852, Edith copied George Beaumont's poem 'The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past' (the original poem was dedicated to Beaumont's deceased mother). Edith also wrote short biographical accounts of her parents and brother and kept a copy of Professor Henry Reed's obituary to Sara Coleridge (transcribed and gifted to Edith by Emily Trevenen). I argue in the conclusion that Jane and Edith represent Coleridge and Shelley as absent presences. In sum, even though Coleridge and Shelley are physically absent, they remain present in textual relics.

Thus, this thesis uncovers different forms of absence and loss in Coleridge's and Shelley's writings. By reading their work through the lens of maternal and child absence, this thesis aims to highlight the multiplicity of loss. Intergenerational dynamics are central to

Coleridge's and Shelley's conceptions of the family, where parents either die early or search for their lost children. This thesis seeks to illustrate Coleridge's and Shelley's understanding of absent presences. Moreover, it endeavours to shed light on the different relics that existed within their respective families, which constituted both material and textual relics associated with deceased loved ones. In so doing it identifies loss as a central tenet of nineteenth-century women's writing.

The Appendices contains full transcriptions of manuscripts referenced in this thesis. It includes papers by and related to the Coleridge and Godwin-Shelley families. I have provided context for each manuscript as well as MS call numbers and locations. My editorial methodology is explained in the Note on Transcriptions.

Chapter 1: Self-Mourning and Maternal Loss in Sara Coleridge's 1830s Poems for and about Children

In August 1851, nine months before her death, Sara Coleridge began her final diary. Diagnosed with breast cancer that year, Coleridge speculates about the likelihood of her early demise. The first page of the diary, which is previously unpublished, reads:

> I begin this new vol of my journal in sadness—my health, I fear, failing not to be recovered. God's will be done! I have had more than my share of this Earth's pleasantness, I do not quit under the thought of the sufferings I may have to go thro'—it is the leaving my children, & while I remain here being weak & a burden, unable to help them and give Edith the advantage of my introductions into society and home converse, that tries my spirits. But God's will be done! Shall I live to finish this vol of journal?[111]

This journal entry touches upon several themes that emerge in Coleridge's 1830s poems. Two decades earlier, Coleridge had given birth to Herbert (b. 1830) and Edith (b. 1832), and had lost two other babies, Berkeley and Florence, in 1834. Although written in different circumstances to the 1851 diary, Coleridge's 1830s poems likewise ruminate on the possibility of her early death.

This chapter uncovers different types of intergenerational mourning in Coleridge's 1830s poems to and for children. It traces a rhetoric of self-mourning, by which I mean how Coleridge mourns her inability to perform a 'Mother's part'.[112] I will argue that Coleridge uses self-mourning to think about her projected absence from her children's future. My

[111] Sara Coleridge, 'Diary 1851', Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.3-4).
[112] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter Swaab (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2007), p. 62 (ln. 9). See D.B. Ruderman, *The Idea of Infancy in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry: Romanticism, Subjectivity, Form* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 138-139.

analysis is indebted to Claire Raymond's study of the feminine self-elegy, which she defines as 'a troped posthumous elegy in which a dead speaker mourns herself' distinct from the traditional elegy 'in its ironic emphasis on the privateness and privation of the speaker presented as at once dead and bereaved'.[113] In self-elegies, the narrator presents themselves as speaking from beyond the grave. This chapter extends Raymond's articulation of the feminine self-elegy by exploring how Coleridge inscribes herself as a dead or dying mother. This chapter also considers the function of interpersonal mourning. By this I mean that a poem can work for more than one death. In the Coleridge family archive, the deaths of mothers and children often intertwine. The poems analysed in this chapter include 'Benoni', 'To Herbert Coleridge. Feb 13 1834', 'Written in my Illness at Hampstead during Edith's Infancy', 'Sara Coleridge for Herbert and Edith. April 19th 1834', and 'Verses written in sickness 1833, before the Birth of Berkeley and Florence'.

My argument builds upon work on posthumous legacies and posterity. Andrew Bennett's *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999) argues that Romanticism as a cultural, artistic, and literary movement 'reinvents posterity as the condition for poetry itself' and that the aesthetic and historical value of such poetry will be judged by 'future generations'.[114] In this way, the value of poetry lies in how it will be read after the poet's death. In his extensive study of 1820s and 1830s literature, David Stewart remarks that posterity 'is something that happens in a detemporalised afterlife' rather than the present moment.[115] By this he means that literature survives long after its author. However, where Bennett and Stewart focus on the public afterlives of Romantic poets, this chapter evaluates the maternal legacy that Coleridge bestows upon her children. My aim is to illustrate the

[113] Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), p. 1.
[114] Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 4.
[115] David Stewart, *The Form of Poetry in the 1820s and 1830s: A Period of Doubt* (Cham: Springer, 2018), p. 215.

ways in which Coleridge thought about how she would be remembered by the next generation of her family.

My understanding of 'legacy' thus differs from Bennett and Stewart. By exploring how Coleridge presents herself as a dying mother, this chapter seeks to highlight the intergenerational dynamics of maternal legacies. In other words, Coleridge's act of self-mourning necessarily raises questions about her children's futures—a future she will be absent from if she dies. Studies of Early-Modern women's history, particularly regarding death in childbirth and infant loss, are useful for the purposes of this chapter as they shed light on the generic traditions of and consolatory responses to death. My interpretation of 'legacy' is influenced by the work of Jennifer Heller, whose study of Early-Modern 'mother's legacies', a genre in which a dead or dying mother transmits guidance to her children, explores women's self-representations of maternal absence.[116] Other intergenerational bonds are explored throughout this chapter. In addition to Coleridge's poems of self-mourning, this chapter also considers her mother Sarah Fricker Coleridge's poems about child loss. Using hitherto unpublished and unused manuscripts, I reveal thematic and personal affinities between Coleridge's and Fricker's experience of motherhood. In so doing this chapter points to different forms of absence—and different forms of maternal legacies—in the Coleridge family archive.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section 1.1a, 'Self-Elegies', introduces the concept of self-mourning as a rhetorical strategy, examining the implications of authors who describe themselves as dead or dying. Section 1.1b, 'Maternal Elegies', explores the function of grieving mothers in elegiac literature. Through an analysis of Early-Modern and eighteenth-century authors like Mary Carey and Charlotte Smith, section 1.1b argues that maternal elegists move between intense grief and acceptance of a child's death. Section 1.1c,

[116] Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early-Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 2-4.

‘Maternal Legacies’, interrogates the function of ‘mother’s legacies’. Comparing Early-Modern ‘mother’s legacies’ with eighteenth century authors like Jane Cave and Isabella Kelly—as well as Coleridge—this section explores the significance of maternal legacies in poems to and for children.

Section 1.2a, ‘Textual and Material Afterlives in the Dedications to Herbert’, analyses ‘Benoni’ and ‘To Herbert’. I will argue that in ‘Benoni’ and ‘To Herbert’ Coleridge speculates about Herbert’s future—one which she may be absent from if she dies early. Moreover, I will suggest that the dedications act as textual substitutes for Coleridge’s projected absence. Section 1.2b, ‘Suicidal Maternity in Coleridge’s Baby Poems’, examines the use of suicidal rhetoric in ‘For Herbert and Edith’ and ‘Written in my Illness’. I will argue that in these poems, motherhood is a site of disconnection. By this I mean that Coleridge detaches herself from her children even as she expresses guilt for doing so. Section 1.2c, ‘Interpersonal Mourning: the Deaths of Berkeley and Florence Coleridge’, examines the Coleridge family’s writings about the deaths of the twins. Using hitherto unpublished and unused material from the Sara Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge papers—as well as critically neglected elegies composed by Hartley and Henry Nelson Coleridge—this section argues that the family participated in a shared language of loss. Tracing the composition and transcription history of Coleridge’s ‘Verses written in sickness’, this section also suggests that a poem can commemorate more than one death. The purpose of this chapter overall, then, is to highlight the different forms of absence and loss that punctuate Coleridge’s writings about maternity and children.

1.1a. Self-Elegies

This section outlines the function of the self-elegy and 'posthumous voice', defined by Raymond as 'a narrator's claim to speak from death as a disembodied space'.[117] In other words, the dead are not physically resurrected; rather, they speak from beyond the grave. I will contextualise Coleridge's act of self-mourning within the tradition of a posthumous poetics. In so doing this section introduces key themes addressed throughout this chapter: legacy, memorialisation, and absence.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Table Talk* (1835), a compilation of his conversation as recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge, includes a brief reflection on the nature of elegy. Henry Nelson Coleridge recalls his uncle observing that the elegy 'presents every thing as lost and gone or absent and future'.[118] Tim Fulford notes that for authors like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Charlotte Smith, the elegy was 'as much a reflective mood as a genre for particular occasions'.[119] The elegy moved away from the graveside: using the example of Smith, Fulford argues that her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) are 'a song of self' rather than a specific response to an event, such as a funeral.[120] In his discussion of Romantic elegies, Stuart Curran contends that they are intended 'for the living'. Citing Samuel Johnson's 1755 definition of 'elegy' as '1. A mournful song 2. A funereal song 3. A short poem without points or affected elegancies', Curran demonstrates the elegy's different applications in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century.[121] Fulford's and Curran's analyses of Romantic elegies provide a useful framework for my reading of Coleridge's self-mourning, as the poems examined in this chapter are not funeral songs: rather, they

[117] Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing*, p. 10.
[118] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in Two Volumes. Vol. I*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), p. 137.
[119] Tim Fulford, *Experimentalism in Wordsworth's Later Poetry: Dialogues with the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 54.
[120] Tim Fulford, *Experimentalism in Wordsworth's Later Poetry*, p. 54.
[121] Stuart Curran, 'Romantic Elegiac Hybridity', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. by Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 238-250 (p. 238).

exhibit the 'reflective mood' identified by Fulford. What is commemorated in an elegy—and who is commemorated—is therefore complicated by the form's various applications.

Jahan Ramazani identifies different types of elegies in his study of the 'modern elegy'. The 'anti-elegy' resists consolation; while Ramazani locates an anti-elegiac strain in modernist verse, this resistance also emerges in earlier parental elegies to dead children, an idea I take forward in the next section of this chapter.[122] The self-elegy, meanwhile, is defined as a 'self-standing meditation on the author's mortality'.[123] The elegy's various functions is useful for the purposes of this chapter as it sheds light on different forms of loss. In the poems studied in this chapter, Coleridge imagines her early death, thereby initiating a process of self-mourning. However, the deaths of other family members—including the twins, Berkeley and Florence, in 1834, and Sarah Fricker in 1845—adds further poignancy to Coleridge's visions of her projected absence. In sum, a poem can speak for more than one death, and the differences between an elegy and self-elegy cannot be easily delineated.

Eve Sorum's observation that self-elegies 'exist in a state of self-reflexivity in which the poetic voice always grapples with its predicated absence' points to the form's complexity. As Sorum recognises, while traditional elegies function 'as a monument and a sign that the mourned is *not* forgotten, self-elegy is always proleptic and, therefore, uncertain about its status as memorial'.[124] This taps into anxieties about future readers, as highlighted in the introduction to this chapter. Others have read the self-elegy in terms of gender. Patrick Vincent proposes the term 'female elegy' to describe poems in which a woman writer conflates her persona with that of a tragic poetess.[125] By contrast, Raymond defines the

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[122] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 2.
[123] Ibid., p. 120.
[124] Eve C. Sorum, 'The Self-Elegy: Narcissistic Nostalgia or Proleptic Postmortem?', in *A Companion to Poetic Genre*, ed. by Erik Martiny (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 93-103 (p. 93).
[125] Patrick H. Vincent, 'Lucretia Davidson in Europe: Female Elegy, Literary Transmission and the Figure of the Romantic Poetess', *Romanticism on the Net*, 29-30 (2004) <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2003-n29-30-ron695/007724ar/> [accessed 15 January 2025].

'feminine self-elegy' as a move away from the 'inherited' tradition of the male elegy. In Raymond's view, by positioning herself as dead, the female self-elegist enacts a reclamation of her voice.[126] My reading of Coleridge's poems builds upon critical interpretations of the self-elegy but differs in certain aspects. By focusing on maternal dynamics, this chapter explores how Coleridge thought she would be read by her children.

I would argue that Coleridge's 1830s poems share common themes with the self-elegy: uncertainty about her future legacy and projected absence. One of the complexities of the self-elegy is that it merges subject and elegist. This conflation of mourner and mourned is felt in Coleridge's transcriptions of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's poems about child loss in the 'Book of Mourning', which I analyse in more depth in the third section of this chapter. In the 1790s Sarah Fricker Coleridge wrote two poems about the illness and death of her son Berkeley; three decades later, Coleridge would address a poem to her own unborn son Berkeley, who would die shortly after birth (along with his twin sister Florence); when Fricker Coleridge died thirteen years later, Coleridge transcribed her mother's poems into the 'Book of Mourning'. This in turn points to the different forms of absence that emerge in elegiac poems. A poem written to commemorate the loss of one person can later come to commemorate the loss of another.

The conflation between mourner and mourned in Coleridge's poetic oeuvre is explored at length in the following sections of this chapter. The next section interrogates the presence of mothers in elegiac literature. Specifically, it situates Coleridge's poems of self-mourning within the context of poems about child loss.

1.1b. Maternal Elegies

[126] Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing*, p. 2.

This section evaluates the presence of mothers in elegiac literature. I will begin by defining the maternal elegy and outlining its generic characteristics. In so doing this section reveals the different forms of absence that underscore Coleridge's poems about motherhood and children.

The term 'maternal elegy' has a relatively broad application within scholarship. Steve Clark's comparative analysis of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard' (1751) and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 'To a Little Invisible Being Who is Expected Soon to Become Visible' (1795) emphasises the use of maternal imagery in elegiac poetry. Clark understands Gray's 'Elegy' as a maternal elegy because it uses pregnancy and birth as metaphors for life and death.[127] Throughout the 'Elegy' Gray uses maternal imagery: the 'narrow cell' where the deceased lies evokes a womb, while the 'heart once pregnant with celestial fire' indicates the spark of consciousness.[128] Similarly, Barbauld's description of the unborn child waiting to be freed from its 'living tomb' suggests the precariousness of childbearing.[129] While Clark understands the maternal elegy as a poem which utilises pregnancy as a metaphor for the transience of human existence, I define the maternal elegy as a work written by or from the perspective of a grieving mother. My aim in this section is to uncover the function of maternal grief in elegiac literature. In so doing it will better contextualise Coleridge's poems of self-mourning.

There is a long tradition of elegies written by mothers. One of the most notable maternal elegists in the Romantic period is Charlotte Smith, whose *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) 'alerts the reader to a thematics of loss and of a mourner left behind'.[130] The

[127] Steve Clark, ''Some Heart Once Pregnant with Celestial Fire': Maternal Elegy in Gray and Barbauld', in *Liberating Medicine, 1720-1835*, ed. by Tristanne Connolly and Steve Clark (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 225-240 (pp. 226-227).
[128] Thomas Gray, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 330-331 (lns. 15, 46).
[129] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, in *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 307 (ln. 20).
[130] Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry, and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 64.

death of Smith's daughter Anna Augusta de Foville in childbirth in 1795, as highlighted in the introductory chapter, became the subject of various sonnets. In Sonnet LXXVIII, 'Snowdrops', Smith laments, 'Ah! ye soft, transient children of the ground/More fair was she on whose untimely grave flow my unceasing tears!'[131] The intensity of Smith's grief is also evident in Sonnet XC, 'To Oblivion', in which she implores Oblivion to 'take me to thy quiet reign/Since robb'd of all that gave my soul delight'.[132] The implication here is that Smith belongs with the dead rather than the living. Coleridge too expressed semi-suicidal inclinations, particularly in 'Written in my illness' and 'Verses Written in sickness', an idea that I develop in the third section of this chapter. However, Coleridge's poems enact a reversal of the *Elegiac Sonnets* insofar as it is the children rather than their mother that are left behind.

In her study of Early-Modern maternal elegies, Lisa Schnell argues that mothers used the elegiac verse form to probe the intensity of their grief as well as their lack of material property. The theological understanding of parenthood in this period stipulated that all children belonged to God: when a child passed away, they were called back to God, leaving their parents 'propertyless'.[133] For instance, Mary Carey's 1652 poem on the death of her son Perigrene depicts a transactional relationship with God. The child is reclaimed by God, and the parents submit to God's will:

> I thought all was given before
>
> but mercy ordered me one more:
>
> A Perigrene; my God me sent

[131] Charlotte Smith, *Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works*, ed. by Claire Knowles and Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2017), p. 114 (lns. 10-12).
[132] Ibid., p. 122 (lns. 6-7).
[133] Lisa J. Schnell, ''Lett me not Pyne for Poverty': Maternal Elegy in Early-Modern England', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, pp. 481-497 (p. 487).

him back againe I do present

As a love token; ‘mongst my others,

One Daughter; and hir 4 deare Brothers:

To my Lord Christ; my only bless;

is, he is mine, and I am his

My Dearest Lord; hast though [*sic*] fulfill’d thy will,

thy hand maid’s pleas’d, Completely happy still:[134]

The notion that humans and God exist in a transactional relationship is not specific to the Early-Modern period. Nor was resignation gendered. For example, in 1820, Robert Southey wrote that the bereavements of his son Herbert and two infant daughters had ‘chastened’ him.[135] Grieving parents and family members often used the language of resignation in their elegies to dead children. Hannah Newton observes that resignation to a child’s death ‘was regarded as virtuous, because it demonstrated a respect for the Lord, and a trust in His providences’.[136] It was also thought that resignation could ‘moderate’ extreme grief.[137] Within this context, unrelenting grief could be interpreted as opposition to God’s will. This suggests that resignation was culturally entrenched. Importantly, resignation guided responses to a loved one’s death after the Early-Modern period, as the poems on child loss in the Coleridge family archive demonstrate.

Infant death was often conceived as a form of divine punishment. Phyllis Mack observes that in the Early-Modern period, ‘the death of an infant might well be spiritually

[134] Mary Carey, qtd. in Lisa J. Schnell, ‘‘Lett me not Pyne for Poverty’’, p. 488.
[135] Robert Southey, qtd. in Lynda Pratt, ‘‘The ‘Entire Man of Letters’?: Robert Southey, Correspondence and Romantic Incompleteness’, in *Romanticism and the Letter*, ed. by Madeleine Callaghan and Anthony Howe (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 99-116 (p. 104).
[136] Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early-Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 149.
[137] Ibid.

catastrophic, because the exhausted mother was instructed to interpret the death as punishment for her own sinfulness'.[138] This suggests that parents may have blamed themselves for the loss of their child(ren). The idea that the death of a child was spurred by their parents' sin is evident in eighteenth and nineteenth-century women's writing also. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, Shelley viewed her children's death as 'atonement' for Harriet Westbrook's suicide. This notion of maternal guilt is especially useful in my discussion of Coleridge's poems of self-mourning, in which Coleridge presents herself as an incapable mother. The circumstances of Coleridge's guilt differ from the other examples cited here. Rather than blaming herself for the death of her children, Coleridge blamed herself for not being an active presence in their lives. As such blame is apportioned to mothers who were seemingly unable to protect their children.

An elegy mourning the loss of a child is by its nature intimate, as the parent (or other family member) comes to terms with their death. Paula R. Backscheider's argument that elegies 'became a way for women to celebrate a relationship, prolong attachment, and deny the possibility of separation and the obliteration of memory' suggests that the elegiac form mediated a spiritual and textual link between living mother and dead child.[139] This tension between attachment and separation is evident in Coleridge's and Fricker's writings about their children, which attempt to compensate for physical absence through the medium of verse.

The next section will turn to the 'mother's legacy' genre, in which a dying mother provides guidance to her children from beyond the grave. Where maternal elegies depict a mother grieving the loss of her child(ren), 'mother's legacies' imagine the children being left

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[138] Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 37.
[139] Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 315.

behind. An examination of 'mother's legacies' reveals thematic similarities with Coleridge's self-mourning poems: namely, how a dying mother wishes to be remembered.

1.1c. Maternal Legacies

Where the previous section examined poems about dead children, this section assesses the function of dead and dying mothers in 'mother's legacies'. In so doing it draws upon critical studies of maternal death, such as Carolyn Dever's *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (1998), which argues that the nineteenth-century 'maternal ideal…takes its shape and its power in the context of almost complete maternal absence'.[140] However, while Dever is primarily concerned with the psychoanalytical significance of maternal absence in Victorian novels, I seek to uncover mothers who fashioned themselves as dead and dying. Through a comparison with Early-Modern and Romantic 'mother's legacies', this section provides a new reading of Coleridge's representations of maternal absence.

Scholarship on Early-Modern motherhood is especially useful for the purposes of this section as it offers an insight into how mothers conceived their 'legacies'. The 'mother's legacy' genre was prominent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Heller outlines the genre's tropes as such: 'they feature a maternal voice, they are written to children, they are cast as deathbed advice, and they provide religious counsel'.[141] Most legacies were written in the style of sermons, letters, prayers, dialogues, and histories. Legacies also 'established the mother's advice book as a recognizable literary form'.[142] Notable Early-Modern legacy authors include Elizabeth Joscelin and Dorothy Leigh. Several

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[140] Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p. xi.
[141] Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early-Modern England*, p. 2.
[142] Ibid.; Jean LeDrew Metcalfe, 'Introduction' to *The Mothers Legacy to her Vnborn Childe* by Elizabeth Joscelin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 6.

eighteenth-century poets, among them Jane Cave and Isabella Kelly, incorporated elements of the genre. Coleridge's poems differ from these legacies. Though some of her poems from the early 1830s have biblical undertones ('Benoni', 'Providence', 'Childish Tears'), she would later admit to her sister-in-law that she had 'been restrained by a reverential feeling and a fear to vulgarize and trivialize and desecrate, from writing much in that way'.[143] Moreover, although Coleridge included didactic poems in her *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children* (1834), the poems discussed in this chapter are not formally instructive. Where Coleridge departs from the legacy tradition is that she does not always wish to communicate her thoughts and feelings to the children. Nevertheless, in this section I will argue that like earlier legacy authors Coleridge extends between the present (the dying mother) and the imminent future (her soon-to-be-motherless children).

The legacy writer is poised at a moment of what Jeremy Tambling has termed 'undecidability'.[144] She may have visions that she will die in childbirth (some legacies were written by pregnant women) or may have since passed away. Heller observes that this literal and rhetorical movement between life and death is one of the defining characteristics of the genre:

> Without exception, legacy writers describe their texts as their last words. A writer may face the uncertainty of childbirth, worrying that she will not live to raise her baby; she may be motivated by a pernicious illness that threatens to take her from her children; she may ponder the frailty that comes with advancing age […] [t]his writing mother, paradoxically both alive and dead, explains that she remains in this world just long enough to record final words

[143] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mary Pridham Coleridge', n.d. (c. 1848), in *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Peter Swaab (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 22. See also Coleridge's 'Dialogues on Regeneration' (1850-51), in Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge and the Oxford Movement: Selected Religious Writings*, ed. by Robin Schofield, pp. 111-206.
[144] Jeremy Tambling, *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001), p. 24.

> of advice for her children. In some cases, she dies shortly after completing her text, while in others, the deathbed is a rhetorical platform. Legacy writers often have as a secondary motivation a host of other traumatic events, including the deaths of husbands.[145]

My primary interest here lies in how the 'mother's legacy' reaches into the future. As Ailsa Grant Ferguson notes, the legacy writer uses a 'posthumous or belated voice' that 'adds a projected future, an effect of the prophetic in the establishment of the posthumous voice'.[146] This projected future is one of maternal absence. For example, in Elizabeth Joscelin's preliminary address to her husband in *The Mothers Legacie, to her vnborne Childe* (1624), she writes, 'it came into my minde, that death <would> ^might^ depriue [deprive] me of time If I should neglect the present'.[147] Similarly, in *The Mother's Blessing* (1616) Dorothy Leigh tells her sons that 'seeing myself going out of the world, and you but coming in, I know not how to perform this duty so well, as to leave you these few lines'.[148] I would argue that Coleridge likewise uses a 'posthumous' voice in her poetic addresses to Herbert and Edith. For example, in 'To Herbert', Coleridge asks her son to 'accept the book/ Which thus I dedicate to thee:/'Tis all thy mother now can do/For him she loves so tenderly.'[149] As she can no longer be an active presence in Herbert's life, she gifts him the little 'book' as compensation.

Jacqueline Labbe's analysis of mother-daughter relationships in the works of Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Shelley stipulates that the

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[145] Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early-Modern England*, p. 5.
[146] Ailsa Grant Ferguson, ''A dumme thynge': The Posthumous Voice as Rhetoric in the Mothers' Legacies of Dorothy Leigh and Elizabeth Joscelin', in *The Absent Mother in the Cultural Imagination: Missing, Presumed Dead*, ed. by Berit Åström (Cham: Springer, 2017), pp. 91-110 (p. 102; p. 100).
[147] Elizabeth Joscelin, *The Mothers Legacy to her Vnborn Childe*, p. 46.
[148] Dorothy Leigh, in *The Death Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane and Grant Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022), p. 91.
[149] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 64 (lns. 15-16).

presence of absent mothers is 'recreated' through the act of reading and writing.[150] In other words, the mother's physical form is substituted for the written word. Such is the case in the texts quoted above, where the mother's deathbed 'legacy' (i.e., a book or poem) is used to transmit guidance to her children. Marilyn Francus' study of 'spectral motherhood'—a term she uses to identify maternal absent presences in eighteenth century literature—is relevant here. Francus' study includes an examination of dead mothers, exploring the ways in which they 'haunt' a text (including novels, letters, and autobiographies). As she observes,

> At best, the dead mother can voice her allegiance to motherhood and the domestic ideal through her letters, her autobiography, her dying words, and her will—like the others [spectral mothers], turning to text to represent and recreate what she cannot. Her legacy, textual and biographical, shapes the destinies of her children far beyond the powers accorded to her while living and present. The dead mother thus has the power to haunt her child forever[.][151]

I apply Labbe's and Francus' analyses in section 2.1a of this chapter, which explores Coleridge's 'recreation' of her maternal presence via the written word. Maternal legacies shed light on how women have thought about their textual afterlives throughout literary history. What is particularly striking about the legacy tradition is that it renegotiates the 'intergenerational dynamics of the deathbed', to quote Alexandra Walsham.[152] By this she means that death was a social event in which children, adults, and extended family members would gather around the deceased. Legacy texts are inherently intergenerational in purpose: a

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[150] Jacqueline M. Labbe, 'The Romance of Motherhood: Generation and the Literary Text', *Romanticism on the Net*, 26 (2002) <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2002-n26-ron381/005698ar/> [accessed 15 January 2025].
[151] Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 179.
[152] Alexandra Walsham, *Generations: Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 434.

dying mother bequeaths her dying words to her children, often writing a supplementary note to her husband which outlines how the children should be instructed. Although Coleridge did not write within the legacy tradition, she too was interested in how death renegotiates familial dynamics. As I discuss in the next section of this chapter, Coleridge's projected physical absence is compensated for by the words she leaves behind.

Read in this light, maternal absence is centred around ideas of preservation and legacy. Elizabeth Raisenen's research into a Romantic 'mother's legacy' tradition in the late eighteenth century posits that the genre was 'drastically revised' in the 1780s and 1790s, insofar as mothers emphasized 'not the child's future life and conduct, but rather the mother's concern for the preservation of her own legacy in her poetry'.[153] Raisanen cites Jane Cave as a notable Romantic legacy writer. Her poem, 'Written a Few Hours Before the Birth of a Child' (1786) conveys the imminency of death, with Cave imploring God that 'if death thy pleasure be;/O may the harmless babe I bear/Haply expire with me'.[154] This anticipation of death emerges in Isabella Kelly's 'To an Unborn Infant' (1794), in which she asks the child to 'Learn…the mournful story/Of thy suffering mother's life'. Unlike Cave, Kelly imagines the child supplying 'my vacant place' beside her husband.[155] Despite key differences, like earlier legacy authors, Cave and Kelly are preoccupied with futurity, preservation, and memory. Cave's and Kelly's pregnancy poems imagine a continued bond between mother and child. They offer two possibilities: their children will either die in childbirth with them or will live according to their dead mother's instructions. As such Cave and Kelly act as absent presences, guiding their children's conduct from beyond the grave. Although death in childbirth was a very real possibility, Cave and Kelly survived multiple births: in this way, maternal death becomes a rhetorical strategy through which they can ponder their legacies.

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[153] Elizabeth Raisanen, 'Pregnancy Poems in the Romantic Period: Re-writing the Mother's Legacy', *Women's Studies*, 45 (2016), 101-121 (p. 103).
[154] Jane Cave, in *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, p. 377 (lns. 14-16).
[155] Isabella Kelly, in *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, p. 483 (lns. 29-30, 35).

To my knowledge, Coleridge wrote only one pregnancy poem, 'Verses Written in sickness'. Her poems differ from Cave's and Kelly's insofar as mother-child bonds are often sites of disconnection. By this I mean that Coleridge's 1830s poems depict a lack of emotional reciprocity between mother and child. The children are incapable of fully grasping her emotional state because of their 'innocence'. The consolidation of Coleridge's maternal legacy is therefore ambiguous. While in some poems Coleridge takes pleasure in Herbert tracing her words, in others the prospect of emotional openess between mother and child is impossible. The next section interrogates the complexity of Coleridge's textual afterlife in its analysis of 'Benoni' and 'To Herbert'.

1.2a. Textual and Material Afterlives in the Dedications to Herbert

Dedications are about legacy. The dedicatee may be a friend, family member, patron, or fellow author (either living or dead). Ross Chambers's idea of the dedication as an 'interpersonal gesture', or an exchange between writer and addressee, acquires more poignancy in dedications to children because they tend to be future-oriented.[156] The parental figure may express their hopes and fears for the child addressee or may present the dedication as something that will serve the child in the future. I will extend Chambers's notion of interpersonal exchange by arguing that in 'Benoni' and 'To Herbert' Coleridge reflects on the possibility of a textual and material afterlife. By this I mean that Coleridge uses the poetic form to imagine Herbert's future and her possible absence in it. I will begin this section with an outline of Coleridge's *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children* (1834), as its production overlaps with the composition of the poems discussed in this chapter. I will then provide a textual analysis of 'Benoni' and 'To Herbert', examining how Coleridge presents herself as a dying mother.

[156] Ross Chambers, 'Baudelaire's Dedicatory Practice', *SubStance*, 17, 1988, 5-17 (p. 6).

Correspondence from the years 1833-1834 reveals that the *Pretty Lessons* was produced in an environment of loss. Coleridge's health had been weakened by successive pregnancies and miscarriages, and in January 1834 she had lost Berkeley and Florence. Writing to her sister-in-law, Coleridge explains that the *Pretty Lessons* is nothing more than a 'a record of my occupations during a malady which leaves so few within my power, weakening as it does the bodily energies and dulling though not preventing those of the mind.[157] A letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to his brother John likewise implies that the *Pretty Lessons* was produced in an environment of illness and loss. 'I am arranging a child's book out of Sara's compositions for Herbert', he writes:

> Of course they have a peculiar interest for him; yet really, upon the whole, they seem to me so much better than all the things I buy for the child, that I think with Parker's getting up, they would sell well; especially for the Latin parts. If P. will give me 50 guineas for the copy, he shall have it—but not [for less?]. However don't tell of this—for Sara is rather forced to it by my marital tyranny. I shall call it—not Darling &c—but Benoni—for truly it has been a child of grief.[158]

The name 'Benoni' translates as 'son of my sorrow'. It stems from Book 35 of Genesis, when Rachel goes into labour with her second son: 'And it came to pass, as her soul was departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin'.[159] Within the context of the dedication to the *Pretty Lessons*, Herbert is identified as the 'son of my sorrow', aligning Coleridge with Rachel.

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[157] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mary Pridham Coleridge', 10-16 July 1834, qtd. in Peter Swaab, *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought*, p. 5.
[158] Henry Nelson Coleridge, 'To John Coleridge', 20 March 1834, qtd. in *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* by Dennis Low (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 123.
[159] *King James Bible Online*, Genesis 35.18 <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/> [accessed 8 November 2023].

A hitherto unpublished letter from Sarah Fricker Coleridge to Mrs Henry Jones provides additional information as to the origins of the name 'Benoni'. The letter insinuates that Mrs Henry Jones had asked for clarification about the name:

> Dearest Mrs Jones,
>
> I am quite ashamed that I never should have asked the question you put to me yesterday: the moment Sara said, 'think of poor Rachel!' I recollected, as; rather recognized the allusion. This little book [*Pretty Lessons*] has, indeed, been the fruit of her affliction—for it never would have been thought of if she had not been prostrate on her sick bed—for she never read, or wrote so little as during the short time that she was able to perform the duties of a wife & mother: she sends her kindest, best regards to you & dear Mrs Park [Coleridge's friend]: she was much pleased at your approbation, and begged me to tell you that it was Henry who gave the <u>word</u> to the printer, and she was surprised to see it there.[160]

Fricker Coleridge repeats the sentiments made by Henry Nelson Coleridge in his letter to John Coleridge (quoted above). However, although Coleridge insisted that it was her husband's decision to print it as 'Benoni', 'think of poor Rachel!' suggests that Rachel's death particularly resonated with her. Above the first page of the letter Fricker Coleridge has added the following note: ''Benoni,' the child of sorrow, or dejection; (The little book [*Pretty Lessons in Verse*]) in allusion to those lines of Wordsworth's in Peter Bell;—she called her child 'Benoni'—see Rachel, Genesis, 36 chap:'.[161] In *Peter Bell* (1798) a 'Highland girl' names her illegitimate son Benoni after Peter Bell, the child's father, absconds: 'She to the

[160] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'To Mrs Henry Jones', 6 July 1835. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3).
[161] Ibid.

bone was worn,/And ere that little child was born/Died of a broken heart'.[162] The biblical reference, combined with the allusion to Wordsworth's Highland Girl, situates the *Pretty Lessons* within an intertextual language of loss. Although Coleridge did not die during or after childbirth as Rachel and the Highland Girl did, family correspondence indicates that she identified with Rachel's suffering.

Women of Coleridge's generation would have been acutely aware that death in childbirth was a very real possibility.[163] According to Geoffrey Chamberlain:

> In the 19th and first half of the 20th century, everybody knew about death in childbirth, particularly those women who were about to go through the process. Although death rates from many other conditions were high, they at least were among people who had been ill beforehand. Death in relation to childbirth was mostly in fit young women who had been quite well before becoming pregnant. They died, often leaving the baby, and other children in the family from previous births, with a widowed husband.[164]

In other words, pregnancy and childbirth is a matter of life and death. It carries with it the risk of serious illness and death. While the birth of a child marks a new 'beginning', it is one that the child's mother may have no part in if she dies. Maternal self-elegies grapple with these issues. In the poems analysed in this chapter, Coleridge reflects on her inability to take an active part in her children's lives. However, in 'Benoni' and 'To Herbert', she remains present through the poems she bestows upon her son.

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[162] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 123 (lns. 1103-1105).
[163] Irvine Loudon, 'Deaths in Childbed from the Eighteenth Century to 1935', *Medical History*, 30 (1986), pp. 1-41; Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 52.
[164] Geoffrey Chamberlain, 'British maternal mortality in the 19th and early 20th centuries', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 99 (2005), 559-563 (p. 559).

‘Benoni’ differs from other dedications to children in the period. Typically, a dedication introduces the child to the contents of the book. For instance, in Emily Trevenen’s *Little Derwent’s Breakfast* (1839), Derwent Moultrie Coleridge is encouraged to take pleasure in ‘this tiny book’ whose purpose is ‘to instruct, and to amuse’.[165] By contrast, in ‘Benoni’ Herbert is encouraged to dwell on the memory of his mother. What is particularly striking about ‘Benoni’ is that Herbert exists both in the present as a little boy and in the future as a man. Here is the poem in full:

MY Herbert, yet thou hast not learnt to prize

Parental love that hovers o’er thee still;

No heavy hours hast thou—no sorrows fill

Thy childish bosom when thou hear’st my sighs;

But thy fresh cheeks and pretty gleaming eyes,

Thy careless mirth, bring happiness to me;

No anxious pitying love I ask of thee—

Be thoughtless still while swift thy childhood flies.

Hereafter thou, my Herbert, wilt discern,

With tender thoughtfulness this heart of mine

That asked no present love, no full return;

And then, while youthful hopes within thee burn,

May’st dream that one to whom thy thoughts incline

[165] [Emily Trevenen], *Little Derwent’s Breakfast* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839), b1 (lns. 2-4). Derwent Moultrie Coleridge was the eldest son of Sara Coleridge’s brother, Derwent.

E'en so may love some cherished child of thine![166]

Tambling's articulation of a 'posthumous reader', which he defines as 'the activity of…turning the text into the past', is particularly relevant here.[167] Within the trajectory of the poem, Herbert grows into a man and comes to appreciate his mother's love. As such Herbert moves from 'thoughtlessness' to thoughtfulness. Coleridge's identification as Rachel suggests that this is a future she will be absent from. Coleridge would not die for another two decades: and yet, like Cave and Kelly, she uses maternal death as a rhetorical strategy to project an imagined future onto her son.

Even if a writer dedicates a poem to a specific addressee, who will read it—and how it will be read—is uncertain. Bennett remarks that the question of poetic address is complicated precisely because the future is unknowable: 'Known and unknown, present and absent, the poet's addressee, his or her reader, is both crucial to the modern poet and vitally displaced to an uncertain future'.[168] In other words, a writer cannot fully comprehend how they will be read after they die. I would argue that this image of a future reader gains additional poignancy in poems addressed to children by absent parents. The parent may wish to encourage the child's sympathetic reading of him or her in the future; equally, they may worry that the child does not know them nor of their feelings. Moreover, the parent may forbid their child gaining knowledge of their suffering. In other instances, there may be a physical or geographical barrier between them. A key example of this is the Ada Lovelace section in Canto III of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816). Exiled from Ada after his separation with Lady Byron, Byron recasts the poem as a paternal gift:

My daughter! with thy name this song begun—

[166] Sara Coleridge, *Pretty Lessons*, b5 (lns. 1-14).
[167] Jeremy Tambling, *Becoming Posthumous*, p. 16.
[168] Andrew Bennett, *Culture of Posterity*, p. 17.

My daughter! with thy name thus much shall end—

I see thee not,—I hear thee not,—but none

Can be so wrapt in thee: thou art the friend

To whom the shadows of far years extend:

Albeit my brow thou never should'st behold,

My voice shall with thy future visions blend

And reach into thy heart,—when mine is cold,—

A token and a tone, even from thy father's mould.

To aid thy mind's development, to watch

Thy dawn of little joys, to sit and see

Almost thy very growth, to view thee catch

Knowledge of objects,—wonders yet to thee!

To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee,

And print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss,—

This, it should seem, was not reserved for me;

Yet this was in my nature: as it is,

I know not what is there, yet something like to this.[169]

[169] George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 118-119 (lns. 3-4, 1067-1084).

For Byron, Ada is unknown because he never saw her again after his annulment. His words become the paternal legacy he wishes to bestow. Both Byron and Coleridge ruminate on the possibility (and in Byron's case, the reality) of parental absence. In addition, they imagine how their words will be interpreted by their children in the future. Byron's visions of parent-child reunion is one of emotional synthesis and understanding: 'My voice shall with thy future visions blend/And reach into thy heart,—when mine is cold,—/A token and a tone, even from thy father's mould'. The use of iambic pentameter means that words such as 'daughter', 'voice', and 'token' are stressed. This in turn reinforces the theme of parent-child separation, as Byron mourns the loss of the daughter he never knew. As Tom Mole observes, '[t]he thought that Ada would read *Childe Harold* Canto Three in the future reinstated the idea of the poem as a medium of communication and stretched it out in time, extending it from the moment of writing to the moment of reading, rather than concentrating it into an imagined instant of composition'.[170] Mole's reading of *Childe Harold* can be applied to Coleridge's dedications to Herbert. Although Coleridge's circumstances differed from Byron's, she too expresses anxiety about how she will be remembered by her son.

Both Byron and Coleridge share an interest in how textual communication acts as a substitute for physical communication between parent and child. Coleridge's situation differs from Byron's in that she lived with her children; her projected absence therefore functions as a rhetorical strategy. Jillian Hess' study of the 'hand' in nineteenth-century books of mourning is particularly relevant here. Hess discerns that nineteenth-century books of mourning 'navigate a tension between rupture and continuity, between spaces left empty because of the owner's death and spaces continued by another writer's hand'.[171] For example, Arthur Henry Hallam's (d. 1833) friends and family transcribed his poems into their own

[170] Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 123.
[171] Jillian M. Hess, *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information: Commonplace Books, Scrapbooks, and Albums* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2022), p. 242.

albums and filled in his abandoned college notebooks to achieve 'closeness with the dead's handwriting'.[172] By copying Hallam's words, the transcriber figuratively resurrected him; at the same time, after his death his words became an elegy *to* and *for* him. The poems Tennyson wrote in the aftermath of Hallam's death are infused with images of physical touch. In 'Break, Break, Break', the speaker wishes 'for the touch of a vanished hand/And a sound of a voice that is still!', while in *In Memoriam* (1851) Tennyson waits for 'a hand that can be clasp'd no more'.[173] In the nineteenth-century, the hands, 'like the face, expressed the unique personality, carrying [a person's] years of living in their seams and texture'.[174] Hence, the hand serves as a reminder of Hallam's physical absence. However, while Hallam cannot be touched corporeally, his presence can be reconstituted through the medium of writing. By this I mean that, although Hallam is physically absent, his presence looms large within the poems.

Lindsey Eckert observes that handwriting has 'interpersonal value' because it promotes familiarity between writer and reader.[175] While Samantha Matthews has detected forms of familial intimacy in the albums of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle, comparatively less has been said about how handwriting facilitates communication between mother and child—and yet poems to and for children make up a relatively significant proportion of Coleridge's manuscript inventory.[176]

In the early 1830s Coleridge produced hundreds of little verse cards for the entertainment and instruction of Herbert and Edith on topics ranging from kings and queens to cats and Latin grammar. The hand she uses in the verse cards is spatially neater and more

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[172] Ibid., pp. 238-239.
[173] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, qtd. in Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, 'Address', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 56-73 (p. 67); *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. by Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview Press, 1999),p. 207 (canto 7, ln. 5).
[174] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death*, p. 119.
[175] Lindsey Eckert, 'Reading Lyric's Form: The Written Hand in Albums and Literary Annuals', *ELH*, 85 (2018), 973-997 (pp. 982-83).
[176] See Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 205-248.

readable than the scrawling hand of her correspondence (see figure 4). In ‘To Herbert’ the lingering power of Coleridge’s hand is revivified by Herbert’s act of speaking the words:

> My hand is weak, beloved child
>
> But I will use my hand for thee:
>
> To write what thy dear tongue shall speak
>
> That pleasure still is left to me.[177]

Here the poem itself mediates communication between Coleridge and Herbert, thereby fostering a sense of intimacy. It is both of the present (for the perusal of Herbert) and of the future (accepting the book, preserving the memory of Coleridge and her words). Written in iambic tetrameter, words like ‘hand’ ‘write’ and ‘weak’ are stressed. This emphasises Coleridge’s illness and desire to communicate with Herbert. Iambic tetrameter is frequently used in children’s poetry as it has a ‘sing-song’ rhythm.[178] As such there is a marked contrast between Coleridge’s morbidity and the playful rhythm in which she writes. As Eckert points out, handwriting has a specific temporality that is foregrounded in the present but also looks towards the future. The ‘now of the poet writing on the dusky page, the now of our reading it, and the now of both past and future readers are different but are connected through the practice of lyric (re)reading’.[179] While in Coleridge’s case it is likely that she would have observed Herbert reading, she also uses it in a rhetorical musing. This allows her to imagine her own textual and material survival.

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[177] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 63 (lns. 5-8).
[178] Andrea Immel, ’An anthologist at work: Richard Johnson compiles *The Poetical Flower-Basket', in The Aesthetics of Children’s Poetry: A Study of Children’s Verse in English*, ed. by Katherine Wakely-Mulrooney and Louise Joy (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 225-242 (p. 233).
[179] Lindsey Eckert, ‘Reading Lyric’s Form’, p. 981.

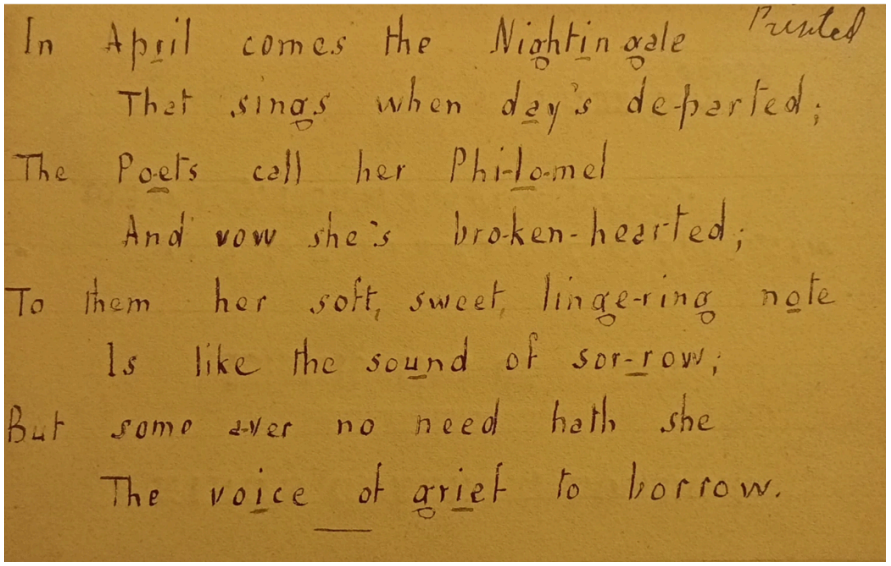


Figure 4: An example of Coleridge's verse cards. This poem was later published as 'The Nightingale' in Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children (1834). Reproduced with permission from the Harry Ransom Center.

In 'To Herbert', the hand signifies maternal presence and absence. It reminds Herbert of his mother's illness and possible death. Coleridge's imagined absence is compensated for by her textual survival in verse form. Hess has looked at the ways in which the hand as a rhetorical object facilitates communication between 'dead' writer and living reader:

> For many mourners, the hand was one of the few anatomical parts they could imagine as recoverable because of its association with handwriting—a person's 'hand' could refer to the five-fingered body part or the traces it left on a piece of paper. Paradoxically, 'the hand' signals physical presence and absence, through its twin definitions: while the anatomical hand is a synecdoche for the body, handwriting can only be metonymic. In other words, the hand, both present (in the traces it left behind) and absent (because it cannot write new lines) demonstrates the entangled relationship between ellipses and metonymy.[180]

[180] Jillian M. Hess, *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information*, p. 240.

A person's writing may live on and be continued or passed onto friends or family members, as is evidenced by Coleridge transcribing Sarah Fricker's poems after she died. In 'To Herbert' Coleridge's hand signifies a physical and mental deterioration which continues as the poem progresses. Her hand is 'weak', her head is 'confused, my thoughts are dull', her heart is 'often sad' and her 'dazzled eyes are dim'. By inscribing herself as a deteriorating mother, Coleridge suggests that the only way she can remain present is through her writing.

Previous commentators like Beatrice Turner have noted that for Coleridge, creativity was incompatible with the demands of motherhood.[181] This was acknowledged by Sarah Fricker Coleridge, who wrote the following epistle to Emily Trevenen when Coleridge was pregnant with Edith:

> You cannot imagine how odd the change in Sara's habits appear to me—so different to those of her maiden days. Reading, writing, walking, teaching, dressing, mountaineering, and I may add, for the latter 10 years of that state—weeping—were her daily occupation with occasional visiting—Now, house orders, suckling, dress and undress—walking, sewing—morning visits and receiving—with very little study of Greek, Latin, and English—(no weeping!) make up…her busy day.[182]

Coleridge wrote a wealth of material about motherhood and children—including diaries, journals, correspondence, and poems. The dedications to Herbert are particularly striking because Coleridge inscribes herself as an absent presence. By positioning herself in a liminal state between life and death, Coleridge imagines the potential revivification of her words through Herbert. The next section evaluates three other poems written in the same period as the dedications to Herbert: 'for Herbert and Edith', 'Written in my Illness', and 'Verses

[181] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 130.
[182] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'To Emily Trevenen', 27 February 1832, qtd. in Katie Waldegrave, *The Poets' Daughters,* p. 140.

Written in sickness'. It analyses how Coleridge uses semi-suicidal rhetoric to interrogate the emotional disconnect between mother and baby.

1.2b. Suicidal Maternity in Coleridge's Baby Poems

This section assesses the use of the suicidal voice in 'for Herbert and Edith' and 'Written in my Illness'. I will argue that Coleridge uses the suicidal voice as a form of posthumous communication between parent and child. Through a comparison with other suicidal mothers of the period, including Wordsworth's Martha Ray, Smith's persona in the *Elegiac Sonnets*, and Felicia Hemans' suicidal and infanticidal mothers, this section will contend that Coleridge mourns her children because she anticipates dying early.

I will begin by outlining Coleridge's 'nervousness' and postpartum depression. When Edith was born in July 1832, Coleridge had initially seemed to cope well but by September began to complain of low appetite, bowel problems, stiffness, crying, hypersomnia, insomnia, and nightmares, all of which were aggravated by opium and morphine intake.[183] In an unpublished letter to her sister-in-law dated 25 October 1832, Coleridge explains:

> When in my worst state I felt a loathing of life and at the same time a morbid horror of death:—I seemed to myself like a dead-alive wretch surrounded, like Tantalus, with all that could make me supremely blest could I but enjoy it, but which only aggravated my misery palsied in body and mind as I felt:—then my children. I cannot describe to you the tearless anguish with which I thought of them: I felt that any ill befalling them would bereave me of reason, & yet their welfare could not give me pleasure. I will dwell no more however on these horrors—I hope & pray that they are gone forever & though my mind &

[183] Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 55.

> body are still far from sanity they are I trust equally far from the wretched state I have been describing.[184]

Coleridge's description of herself as a 'dead-alive wretch' is significant as it reflects the oscillation between absence and presence. While Coleridge is 'bereaved' by the thought of her children suffering, their welfare is not a source of comfort. Rather, it brings into sharp focus her own physical and emotional suffering.

Fricker Coleridge repeats Coleridge's expressions of maternal guilt in a letter to Emily Trevenen dated 5 October 1832. After giving an account of Coleridge's poor health and 'nerves', Fricker Coleridge describes her daughter's fears:

> God grant her fears may be unfounded, but this she <u>does</u> fear; she says, she can no longer be a mother to her precious babes, and asks me, with many tears, not to desert them! Blesses the hour that decided my coming to be with her, and if God spare her life, she will exert every nerve to requite me for all I have done & suffered for her. You may imagine what it costs me to hear & see all this![185]

These feelings of maternal guilt underscore Coleridge's baby poems, which oscillate between an earnest wish to care for her children and a desire to free herself of emotional and physical torment. 'For Herbert and Edith' describes Coleridge's guilt at weaning Edith early. 'Ten months I ministered my Herbert's food', she writes, 'but weakness laid me low/And dried that fount and bade mine eyes o'erflow'.[186] Here the maternal body, traditionally an image of nourishment, becomes a site of disconnection because Coleridge is unable to breastfeed Edith. Lack of breastmilk prevents the interpersonal attachment between mother and child.

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[184] Sara Coleridge, 'To Mary Pridham Coleridge', 25-28 October 1832. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 8.3-9.4).
[185] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'To Emily Trevenen', 5 October 1832. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3).
[186] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 87 (lns. 1-4).

Her description in 'Written in my Illness' of those 'Who ne'er again shall meet the joyous gale/Ne'er bound o'er springy turf with step secure' accords with her self-representations as a sick mother.[187] Fricker Coleridge's letter to Trevenen thus articulates themes that re-emerge in Coleridge's writings about motherhood.

Although there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Coleridge attempted suicide, she expressed suicidal inclinations. Coleridge's friend Aubrey de Vere recalled a conversation with Fricker Coleridge in which she explained that her daughter 'had suffered so much from the spine and the nerves, that she was always weeping and wishing to die'.[188] In 1834, the year she gave birth to the twins, Coleridge wrote an essay 'On Nervousness' which sets forth an imagined dialogue between the 'Invalid' of her body and the 'Good Genius' of her mind. In one scene, Invalid and Good Genius discuss sympathy (and its potential lack) in others:

> *Invalid*. Under the most favourable circumstances, derangement of the nervous system must be a heavy trial, but how greatly is it aggravated by our own experience and that of others!
>
> *Good Genius*. Nervous derangement is in many ways most trying both to those who undergo and them who witness it: those who suffer have to allow for the ignorance in others of what can be recognised by so few outward signs, and those around have great need of charity and candour to put faith in our report, and shew pity for ills with which they cannot sympathize.[189]

Although Good Genius acknowledges that sufferers 'are sadly too apt to create or magnify such evilmindedness in others', the essay suggests that those who have not experienced physical or mental illness cannot fully sympathize with those who have.[190] The poems

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[187] Ibid., p. 61 (lns. 3-4).
[188] Aubrey de Vere, 'Diary', 6 August 1841, in *Aubrey de Vere, A Memoir, Based on his Unpublished Diaries and Correspondence*, ed. by Wilfrid Ward (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1904), p. 89.
[189] Sara Coleridge, 'Nervousness', in *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter*, p. 214.
[190] Ibid., p. 215.

analysed in this section also reckon with a potential lack of empathy and understanding. Herbert's and Edith's innocence prevent a sympathetic encounter between mother and child. In 'For Herbert and Edith' the children do not respond to Coleridge's tears, 'For what of tears can your light bosoms deem/But April gems that freshen where they gleam?' Unable to be present in her children's lives, Coleridge resigns herself 'To point where blossoms of Parnassus grow/And garlands twine upon my sickly bed/To grace your pensive brows when I am dead'.[191] Similarly, in 'Written in my Illness' Coleridge looks towards 'A grave, the image of that perfect rest'.[192] The implication in these poems is that Coleridge's earthly body is the locus of suffering, whereas the 'grave' represents peace. Nevertheless, this 'perfect rest' is complicated by the fact that it would require Coleridge to leave her children behind.

Even though some of her poems about motherhood are not overtly addressed to the children, Coleridge's notes suggest that they were a product of postpartum illness. For example, Coleridge writes in the 'Red Book' (a bound volume she used to transcribe verse) that her poem 'Sickness' was 'Written during my long illness after the birth of Edith in 1832'.[193] In the poem, Coleridge contrasts daily life with her own suffering:

> Since I am faultering, sinking on my way,
>
> The sight of Nature, ever young and gay,
>
> Might lead my tutored spirit to rebel.
>
> Yet those bright shews are now of higher worth,
>
> Summoned by Thought and gorgeously combined,
>
> Than when I move unfettered as the wind—

[191] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 87 (lns. 17-18, 22-24).
[192] Ibid., p. 62 (ln. 37).
[193] Ibid., p. 216.

They help to build for me new Heav'ns and Earth,

For as a Mountain, rising in the West,

Appears transfigured by the Sun's past light,

And, while the shades are gathering, looks more bright

Than late it seemed, in noon-tide splendour drest,

So the unconquered mind, by suffering tried,

For which few pleasures and few hopes remain,

Some exquisite delights e'en yet may gain,

That in Life's gladder season are denied.[194]

Childbearing and motherhood thus inform Coleridge's poetic representations of illness and death, even if—as in 'Sickness'—the children are not explicitly identified as addressees. In 'Sickness' and 'Written in my Illness' Edith functions as an absent presence. By this I mean that Edith's birth and infancy is alluded to rather than directly evoked in the poems. These poems differ from the others discussed in this chapter as Coleridge does not specifically address her children. Her dedications to Herbert identify him as 'My Herbert', while 'For Herbert and Edith' refer to her 'babes'.[195] The only explicit reference made to Edith is in the full title of 'Written in my Illness at Hampstead during Edith's Infancy'. The poem therefore implies that Coleridge's 'illness' is a product of maternity, even if she cannot say this openly *to* Edith.[196]

[194] Ibid., p. 60 (lns. 14-28).
[195] Ibid., p. 64 (ln. 1), p. 87 (ln. 7).
[196] Ibid., p. 61.

Coleridge's diaries from the early 1830s provide additional evidence of her 'wretchedness'. In November 1833, two months before the birth of Berkeley and Florence, she wrote in her diary:

> O woe is me! O misery! The sensations of utter helplessness and heart sinking wretchedness with slight intervals of mitigation have been more over powering than ever since I wrote last. And then she wept again, because she had no more to say of that perpetual weight which on her spirits lay.[197]

Here Coleridge references Wordsworth's Martha Ray and 'The Female Vagrant' (1798). Martha Ray appears in 'The Thorn' (1798) as a grieving mother who weeps beside a 'heap/ That's like an infant's grave in size'.[198] In the poem, Martha Ray becomes the subject of local gossip: rumours circulate that she has murdered her infant and tends to its grave in remorse. Her cries of 'Oh woe is me! oh misery!' are heard 'At all times of the day and night'.[199] Mark Sandy's observation that Wordsworth 'supplies a series of individual and collective voices—by turns grief-stricken, judgmental, sympathetic, and superstitious—in which the figure of Martha and her deceased child perpetually recede' indicates the affective complexity of 'The Thorn', which is at once grounded in 'tragic abandonment, insanity, maternal cruelty, misadventure, guilt, and grief'.[200] Coleridge's attitudes towards motherhood are likewise emotionally complex: while she cared deeply for her children, she was reduced to a 'wretched' state. The final sentence of her diary entry, 'And then she wept again, because she had no more to say of that perpetual weight which on her spirits lay', is taken from the closing lines of 'The Female Vagrant'. The poem describes the interlocutor's encounter with the Female Vagrant, who relates her life story to him: her father was made destitute, her

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[197] Sara Coleridge, qtd. in *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* by Hilary Marland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 87.
[198] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, p. 61 (lns. 60-61).
[199] Ibid., (lns. 77, 67).
[200] Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), p. 37.

husband and children died at sea, and she now wanders the country alone. Coleridge's identification with the Female Vagrant therefore suggests intense suffering. Particularly relevant for the purposes of this section, however, is how Martha Ray's and the Female Vagrant's stories are told.

In 'The Thorn' and 'The Female Vagrant', language proves an insufficient expression of grief. Martha Ray sobs 'Oh woe is me! oh misery!' while the Female Vagrant is unable to speak of 'that perpetual weight which on her spirits lay'.[201] Ian Ward's interpretation of 'The Thorn' as 'a chronicle of absence and of silence, of the disarticulation which possesses Martha and all who try to recount her story' informs my reading of Coleridge's suicidal poems.[202] Coleridge repeatedly struggled to communicate her thoughts and feelings to her family. In 'No joy have I in passing themes', for instance, she laments:

> No joy have I in passing themes,
>
> I cannot smile my friends to cheer:
>
> Then be it mine to cherish dreams,
>
> And hide, if not repress, the tear.
>
> No more I do a mother's part;
>
> My life's sad scene a weary bed;
>
> Then silent be my breaking heart,
>
> I'll be as still as I were dead.[203]

[201] William Wordsworth, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu, p. 370 (ln. 270).
[202] Ian Ward, 'The Voice of Martha Ray', *Pólemos*, 8 (2014), 245-357 (p. 347).
[203] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 96 (lns. 1-8).

I agree with Peter Swaab that this poem 'communicate[s] her sorrow as well as her desire to escape the burden of communicating at all'.[204] Coleridge used private diaries and poems as a form of confession; however, in the addresses to her children, she resists emotional openness even as she speaks of her suffering. 'Written in my Illness' includes another reference to 'The Female Vagrant', suggesting that this poem strongly resonated with Coleridge. Her description of 'Victims of sickness' whose piety 'cools 'the fever of the languid heart'' refers to the hospital scene in 'The Female Vagrant', in which the Female Vagrant compares those who suffer with those who do not.[205] Coleridge's various allusions to the Female Vagrant and Martha Ray thus worked as a metaphor for her own feelings of isolation.

Unlike Martha Ray and the Female Vagrant, Coleridge did not imagine her children dying; rather, she expected to die herself. This is despite the fact that only two of Coleridge's children survived babyhood. In this way she also differs from Felicia Hemans, whose suicidal mothers commit infanticide. 'The Wife of Asdrubal' is told from the perspective of the wife of General Asdrubal, who had surrendered to the Roman forces when Carthage was ransacked. Stood on the roof of the temple with her children, the Wife 'With frantic laugh…clasps them…Then deep midst rolling flames is lost to mortal eye'.[206] Similarly, in 'The Image in Lava' (1828), a woman sacrifices herself and her child as Pompeii burns around them. According to the woman, it is,

> Far better then to perish,
>
> Thy form within its clasp,
>
> Than live and lose thee, precious one!

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[204] Peter Swaab, 'Sara Coleridge: Poems and Their Addressees', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 33 (2009), 45-64 (p. 56).
[205] William Wordsworth, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, p. 369 (ln. 206).
[206] Felicia Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2002), p. 65 (lns. 65-68).

From that impassion'd grasp.[207]

In Hemans's poems about sacrificial mothers, then, maternal suicide is accompanied by infanticide. Kelly McGuire notes that Hemans conceives of suicide as an 'interpersonal event' insofar as mother and baby die together.[208] That Hemans' suicidal mothers paradoxically 'preserve their connections to the domestic sphere in their inability or refusal to accept separation from their children' differs markedly from the mother-baby dynamic in Coleridge's suicidal poems.[209] In 'for Herbert and Edith' and 'Written in my Illness' this dual sacrifice of mother and baby is eschewed. This is because Coleridge sacrifices herself instead. As such Coleridge's suicidal poems challenge Émile Durkheim's claim that an individual's role as 'as functionaries of the family association' protect them from suicide insofar as her suicidal inclinations arose from her experience of childbirth and motherhood.[210] This in turn reinforces the complexity of the mother-child bond in Coleridge's poems. While Coleridge expressed affection for her children, she nevertheless sensed an emotional disconnect between them. The next section reconfigures McGuire's idea of interpersonal suicide by examining a shared language of parental mourning in manuscript material related to the death of Berkeley and Florence Coleridge.

1.2c. Interpersonal Mourning: The Deaths of Berkeley and Florence Coleridge

This section compares Coleridge's 'Verses written in sickness', written while she was pregnant with the twins, with Henry Nelson Coleridge's and Sarah Fricker Coleridge's poems on child loss. In so doing it highlights different forms of child loss. Coleridge's twin boy, Berkeley, was named after Fricker's son Berkeley, who died of complications arising from an

[207] Ibid., p. 349 (lns. 29-32).
[208] Kelly McGuire, ''I leave thee not': Felicia Hemans and Maternal Suicide', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 51 (2018), 121-137 (p. 122).
[209] Ibid., p. 122.
[210] Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1951 [1897]), p. 198.

inoculation against smallpox in 1799.[211] Fricker penned an elegy to Berkeley (b. 1798), while Henry Nelson Coleridge wrote a poem on Berkeley and Florence's death in 1834. The loss of these three children were significant events in the Coleridge family. Manuscript material from the Coleridge family archive reveals a shared language of parental mourning. Though Coleridge uses a rhetoric of self-mourning in 'Verses written in sickness', this section argues that a poem can speak for more than one death. I will begin by outlining the circumstances of Berkeley's (b. 1798) illness and death.

Berkeley (b. 1798) died in 1799 after a short illness. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was absent at the time of his son's death and, at the insistence of Thomas Poole, was kept ignorant of the fact until March, just over a month after Berkeley's passing. This meant that Fricker Coleridge dealt with Berkeley's death largely by herself. Previously unpublished manuscripts reveal the depth of her grief. 'On the Lamentable Sickness of Little Berkeley during his Father's Absence in Germany in 1799', and 'On the Death of Berkeley Coleridge, 11 Months Old' give voice to Fricker Coleridge's anxieties about her baby. In the former, she laments:

> Oh, interpose kind heaven, thy succours lend:
>
> Put forth thy hand, my drooping infant save;
>
> In mercy spare what thou in mercy gave.—
>
> But if his doom is that of David's son;
>
> I from the earth rise, & say, Thy will be done.[212]

'David's son' is a reference to the second Book of Samuel, in which God kills David's infant son as punishment for his sin. Newton explains that ideas of parental resignation stemmed

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[211] Neil Vickers, 'Coleridge's Marriage and Family', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), pp. 68-88 (p. 76).
[212] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'On the Lamentable Sickness of Little Berkeley during his Father's Absence in Germany in 1799'. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.1).

from David's attitude to his son's illness: specifically, how, after the child died, David 'washed his face and sat up and ate' because he could not change God's will.[213] Biblical references recur in parental elegies: like earlier elegists, Fricker Coleridge pleas for 'mercy' before resigning herself to 'Thy will'. However, as Newton points out, 'parents' expression of submission to God's will cannot be taken as irrefutable evidence of their feelings of resignation'. Rather, as resignation was a culturally accepted expression of grief, parents may have attempted 'to attain the necessary composure through writing down what they should be feeling'.[214] This dual acceptance of and conflict with God's will emerges in Fricker Coleridge's poems and correspondence on Berkeley's death.

While Fricker Coleridge insisted that she accepted God's will, she struggled with Berkeley's death. Writing to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in March 1799, Fricker Coleridge tells him that 'My darling infant left his wretched Mother on the tenth of February, and tho the leisure that followed was intolerable to me, yet I could not employ myself in reading or writing, or in any way that prevented my thoughts from resting on him'.[215] In this letter, Fricker Coleridge contends not only with the intensity of her grief but also her husband's absence. She describes Berkeley's death as:

> …the severest trial that I have ever yet undergone and I pray to God that I may never live to behold the death of another child for O my dear Samuel! It is a suffering beyond your conception! You will feel, and lament the death of your child, but you will only recollect him a baby of 14 weeks, but I am his Mother and have carried him in my arms, and have fed him at my bosom, and have watched over him by day and by night for 9 months, I have seen him at the

[213] Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early-Modern England*, p. 149.
[214] Ibid., p. 150.
[215] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'To Samuel Taylor Coleridge', 25 March 1799. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3).

> brink of the grave but he has returned, and recovered and smiled upon me like an angel—and now I am lamenting that he is gone![216]

Though Fricker Coleridge acknowledges that Samuel Taylor Coleridge will 'feel' the death of Berkeley, she reminds him of her constant presence in their son's life. Peppered throughout this letter are frequent pleas for Samuel Taylor Coleridge to return to England. In the closing lines of 'On the Death of Berkeley Coleridge', she asks, 'ah, where art thou, unconscious father [Samuel Taylor Coleridge], where?/Whilst thy poor Sara weeps in sad despair!'[217] Read in this context, Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems mourn not only the death of her infant son, but also the absence of his father. In this way, Sarah Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems are intergenerational relics as they broach the triple absences of son, father, and husband. This in turn points to concurrent forms of loss.

In her study of grief in nineteenth-century American culture and literature, Dana Luciano points out that mourning rituals bridged the gap between the living and the dead:

> By the nineteenth century, grief had become something to be cherished rather than shunned. No longer simply a sign of disobedience to the divine will, the pain of grief was now the body's spontaneous and natural testimony to the importance of interpersonal attachment; indeed, its persistence helped keep alive attachment even in the absence of the beloved object.[218]

Here Luciano indicates a shift in cultural behaviours of mourning, in which expressions of grief became increasingly personal. Nevertheless, I would argue that 'divine will' retained its influence in responses to death, as I have outlined in my analysis of Fricker Coleridge's

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[216] Ibid.
[217] Sarah Fricker Coleridge, 'On the death of little Berkeley Coleridge, 11 Months Old'. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.1).
[218] Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 2.

Berkeley poems in section 1.2c of this chapter. The idea of loss as an 'interpersonal attachment' is particularly useful for the purposes of this section as it illustrates the sociability of grief. In this section I contend that the Coleridge family's writings about Berkeley and Florence reveal a shared language of mourning.

Coleridge's address changes depending on the copy she was working on at the time. Table 1 outlines these different manuscript versions below.

Title	Location	Hand
'Verses written in sickness'	Sheet of paper	Sara Coleridge
'Verses written in sickness 1833 before the Birth of Berkeley & Florence. by S.C. copied out by her dear mother'	Sara Coleridge's 'Red Book' (a bound volume of transcribed verse)	Sara Coleridge (copy of a manuscript by Sarah Fricker) At the bottom of the page Sara Coleridge has written, 'Sara Coleridge to her Husband, Mother & Children. written on my mother's bed, November 7th 1833, Hampstead'
'Verses by Sara Coleridge in Nervous Illness before the Birth of the Twins'	An envelope	Sarah Fricker Coleridge (with title written in Sara Coleridge's hand)

The words of the poem remain the same across these different manuscripts. Even so, that the poem exists in different versions points to the interpersonal textuality of the poem. While the poem is addressed partially to her children, Fricker Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge were part of its intended audience. Within the textual parameters of the poem, the children remain unknowing. Yet, if the address to Sarah Fricker Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge is taken into consideration, the children's unknowingness is Coleridge's dying wish:

> You will not droop, my precious dears,
>
> When I am numbered with the dead:

You ne'er can know my cares and fears;

Your eyes will fill with childish tears,

Which o'er my grave will not be shed.

When others weep and mourn for me

That I no longer must be here,

Ne'er may they quench your childish glee;

No sadness ever may you see

To check the laugh of thoughtless cheer.

But when you gain reflection's dow'r

O ne'er thus joyless may you pine!

Ne'er may you know the anguished hour,

The sickening fears that overpower

This crushed but struggling heart of mine.[219]

The lines 'Ne'er can you know my cares and fears', 'Ne'er may they quench your childish glee', and 'Ne'er may you know the anguished hour' are aimed at her husband and mother. This recalls the multiple addressees of 'mother's legacies', which often included a prefatory letter to the writer's husband, instructing him how to take care of the child(ren) and preserve her legacy. Here, though, Coleridge is directing how the children should mourn—or not

[219] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, pp. 62-63 (lns. 11-25).

mourn—her. Though Swaab notes that some of Coleridge's poems 'were hidden from all other eyes, even family ones', the composition of 'Verses Written in sickness' indicates that aspects of her suffering were known to certain family members.[220]

Acknowledging Fricker Coleridge as a manuscript witness in the composition of 'Verses Written in sickness' reveals thematic overlaps with her 1790s Berkeley poems. Two Berkeley Coleridges existed: the Berkeley born in 1798 to Sarah Fricker Coleridge and the Berkeley born in 1834 to Sara Coleridge. It is likely that Coleridge's infant son was named after her deceased brother. It was not unusual for children to be named after deceased or living relatives. Three of Coleridge's children were named after the children of her uncle Robert Southey: Herbert, Edith, and Bertha. Nevertheless, what is particularly striking about Berkeley (b. 1798) is his lingering presence in Coleridge's verse and life writing. As D.B. Ruderman points out, Berkeley (b. 1798) is a recurring presence in Coleridge's unfinished autobiography.[221] For instance, she recalled Fricker Coleridge telling her that 'as a young infant, I was not so fine and flourishing as Berkeley'.[222] Writing to Emily Trevenen in 1833, Coleridge gives an account of Henry Nelson Coleridge's trip to Nether Stowey, 'where my unknown baby brother Berkeley, a beautiful infant, was born'.[223] When Fricker Coleridge died in 1845, Coleridge transcribed 'On the Lamentable sickness of little Berkeley' and 'On the death of Berkeley Coleridge' in the 'Book of Mourning'. Hence, after 1845 Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems have threefold significance, commemorating the loss of an infant son, brother, and mother. Read in this light, the language of resignation that Fricker Coleridge used to ease her grief in the 1790s is appropriated by Coleridge in the 1840s as she comes to terms with her mother's death.

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[220] Peter Swaab, 'Sara Coleridge: Poems and Their Addressees', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 33.1 (2009), 45-64 (p. 45).
[221] D.B. Ruderman, *The Idea of Infancy*, p. 140.
[222] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge. Edited by her Daughter*, *I* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), p. 3.
[223] Ibid., p. 66.

Elegies can therefore be addressed to more than one individual. Wordsworth's poems on child loss are especially insightful here. His poem 'Surprized by Joy' (1813), which responds to the death of his daughter Cate, was composed shortly after the loss of his son Thomas (both died in 1812). Bennett argues that by 'collapsing the deaths of two children into one…the poem can work for more than one death'.[224] High mortality rates in this period meant that several deaths could occur within a short space of time, as the deaths of Cate and Tom Wordsworth attest to. This reading applies to Coleridge's transcriptions of Fricker's Berkeley poems. What was originally a dirge on the death of an infant becomes a lament for Coleridge's dead mother. Situating 'Verses Written in sickness' within the context of Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems reveals the personal and thematic links between them. The composition history of the Berkeley poems suggests a conflation between mourner and mourned.

Although Coleridge had envisaged her own death in 'Verses written in sickness', the poem became an elegy for Berkeley and Florence. Coleridge wrote in her diary that on the 16th January, two days after they were born, the twins 'gave up their feeble little lives…one in the morning the other in the evening'.[225] A hitherto unpublished letter in Sara Coleridge's archive sheds light on the interpersonal significance of child loss. Writing to her mother-in-law Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge in February 1834, Coleridge gives a brief insight into the deaths of Berkeley and Florence. 'Of my little departed infants', she writes, 'I will only say that I soon felt reconciled to parting with them and thankful that they were spared further suffering—though no mother can part with the tenderest weakling to which she has given birth without some sorrowful emotion'.[226] Here Coleridge uses the language of resignation to process the loss of the twins. The letter includes a few lines from Henry Nelson

[224] Andrew Bennett, *Culture of Posterity*, pp. 110-111.
[225] Sara Coleridge, qtd. in *The Poets' Daughters* by Katie Waldegrave, p. 145.
[226] Sara Coleridge, 'To Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge', 28 February 1834. Harry Ransom Center ((MS-0866, container 4.9).

Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge (see figure 5). It was common in the period for more than one person to contribute to a letter. Regarding the deaths of Berkeley and Florence, Coleridge's correspondence reveals the extent to which Fricker Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge were acquainted with her suffering. On the back of the letter Henry Nelson Coleridge wrote a few lines in which he explains that his wife's 'miserable state will not be guessed from this cheerful letter—wich [*sic*] she wrote in the intervals of hysterics'.[227] Above Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge's address Fricker Coleridge has written, 'a most interesting letter of poor Sara's just after the Birth & death of the Twins'.[228] Beneath she has written '(S.C. H.N.C.) & Berkeley and Florence Coleridge' (see figure 5). Fricker Coleridge's note provides evidence of the Coleridge family's cataloguing of loss. This appears elsewhere in the family papers, such as Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning', which was used to record the deaths of family and friends as well as to transcribe poems and obituaries. More relevant for the purposes of this section is the family's response to the untimely deaths of Berkeley and Florence.

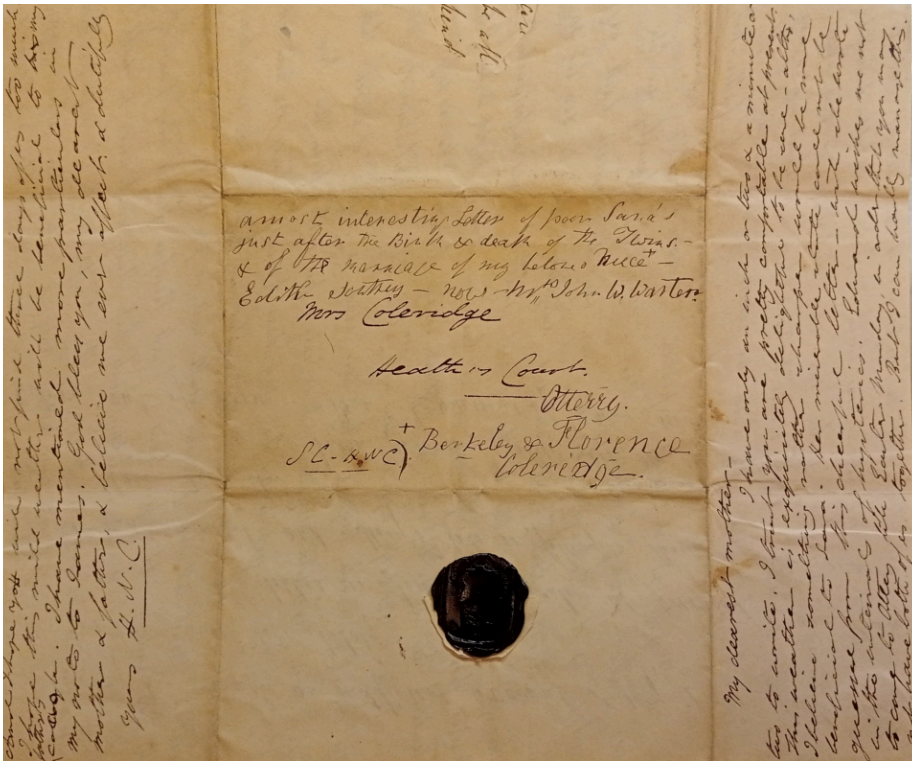


Figure 5: The back of Sara Coleridge's letter to Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge, 28 February 1834. Reproduced with permission from the Harry Ransom Center.

The writing on the left and right side of the page is in Henry Nelson Coleridge's hand; the middle in Sarah Fricker's hand.

To my knowledge, Coleridge did not write poems about her dead children. However, other family members did, including Hartley Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge. Hartley's 'Twins' (1834) and Henry Nelson Coleridge's 'On Berkeley and Florence Coleridge, who Died on the 16th of January, 1834' (1834) are relatively underexplored, yet both shed light on different experiences and forms of loss. Here is Hartley's sonnet in full:

> But born to die, they just had felt the air,
>
> When God revoked the mandate of their doom.
>
> A brief imprisonment within the womb,
>
> Of human life was all but all their share.
>
> Two whiter souls unstained with sin or care
>
> Shall never blossom from the fertile tomb;—
>
> Twin flowers that wasted not on earth their bloom,

So quickly Heaven reclaimed the spotless pair.

Let man that on his own desert relies,

And deems himself the creditor of God,

Think how these babes have earned their paradise;

How small the work of their small period:

Their very cradle was the hopeful grave,

God only made them for His Christ to save.[229]

The language of resignation is multifaceted: while Coleridge was resigned to her early death in 'Verses written in sickness', Hartley and Henry Nelson Coleridge's poems resign themselves to the twins' loss. As in Hartley's poem, Henry Nelson Coleridge's 'On Berkeley and Florence Coleridge' presents the twins as God's children: 'O gifts beyond all price, no sooner given/Than straight required by Heaven'.[230] This recalls the transactional relationship between God and humans outlined in section 1.1b, as evidenced in Mary Carey's dirge for her son Peregrine Peylor.

'On Berkeley and Florence Coleridge' enacts a reversal of 'Verses written in sickness' insofar as Henry Nelson Coleridge stands over the twins' grave. In 'Verses written in sickness' Coleridge had imagined the children's eyes brimming 'with childish tears/Which o'er my grave will not be shed'.[231] In Henry Nelson Coleridge's elegy to the twins, tears become a symbol of parental grief:

Though cold ye lie in earth—though gentle death

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[229] Hartley Coleridge, *Poems by Hartley Coleridge. With a Memoir of His Life by His Brother, II* (London: Edward Moxon, 1851), p. 121 (lns. 1-14).
[230] Henry Nelson Coleridge, in *The Poetical Works of S.T. Coleridge*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1834), p. 149 (lns. 3-4).
[231] Sara Coleridge, *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, p. 62 (lns. 14-15).

Hath suck'd your balmy breath,

And the last kiss which your fair cheeks I gave

Is buried in yon grave.

No tears—no tears—I wish them not again;

To die for them was gain,

Ere Doubt, or Fear, or Woe, or act of Sin

Had marr'd God's light within.[232]

In keeping with cultural and theological responses to loss, Henry Nelson Coleridge expresses resignation at the death of the twins. However, as in Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems, resignation is countered with intense grief. Although it is 'glorious' to think of the twins 'Untainted from the earth', Henry Nelson Coleridge laments, 'yet ah! my babes, ah! still/A father's heart ye fill'.[233] His elegy is additionally significant as it was published in the 1834 edition of *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, appearing between Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'On an Infant Which Died Before Baptism' and his deathbed poem 'E Cœlo Descendit'.[234] Henry Nelson Coleridge's decision to include his elegy to Berkeley and Florence between these poems thus indicates a shared language of loss and resignation.

As such there are reverberations of loss across the Coleridge family's writings about child loss. Though each poem discussed in this section is written from a different perspective, there are personal and thematic links between them. The presence of Fricker Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge in 'Verses written in sickness' and Coleridge's correspondence regarding the deaths of Berkeley and Florence indicate a shared experience of grief.

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[232] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *The Poetical Works of S.T. Coleridge*, p. 150 (lns. 13-20).
[233] Ibid., (lns. 7-12).
[234] Ibid., pp. 149-150.

Coleridge's transcriptions of Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems in the 'Book of Mourning' provide further evidence of the interpersonal significance of child loss. Hartley and Henry Nelson Coleridge's dirges on Berkeley and Florence enact a tragically ironic reversal of Coleridge's 'Verses written in sickness' insofar as the twins, rather than Coleridge, died. Hence, the Coleridge family's writings about Berkeley and Florence point to a conflation between mourner and mourned.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined different forms of mourning in Coleridge's 1830s poems to and for children. It has suggested that these poems can be understood as self-elegies. Reading the poems in this light reveals the ways in which Coleridge thinks of herself as a dying mother who will be henceforth absent from her children's lives.

The prospect of being absent in the future spurs Coleridge to deliberate her maternal legacy. This chapter has proposed an alternative reading of 'legacy', arguing that Coleridge's 1830s poems reveal an anxiety about how she will be remembered by her family. A comparison with the 'mother's legacy' tradition, in which a dead or dying mother transmits posthumous guidance to her children, offered a new insight into Coleridge's self-representations of maternal absence. In sum, the written word acts as a substitute for Coleridge's physical presence. Furthermore, a comparative analysis with Coleridge's dedications to Herbert with Byron's Ada Lovelace passages in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* highlighted thematic affinities between them: namely, an interest in the affective and spatial disconnection between parents and children.

Building upon this idea of mother-child disconnection, section 1.3b explored themes of suicidal maternity in Coleridge's baby poems. I suggested that Coleridge's suicidal ideation differs from those of her contemporaries—such as Hemans—insofar as mother and

baby do not die together; rather, the children are left behind. An analysis of Coleridge's diaries from the early 1830s further revealed affinities with Wordsworth's 'mad mothers', especially Martha Ray and the Female Vagrant. This in turn indicated a shared intertextual language of mourning.

Section 1.3c explored interpersonal mourning in the Coleridge family's writings about Berkeley and Florence. My comparative analysis of Fricker Coleridge's poems on the death of her infant son Berkeley with Coleridge's poems of self-mourning highlighted a shared language of parental mourning. The death of Berkeley in 1799 resounded across four decades, with Coleridge naming one of the twins after her deceased brother and later copying her mother's poems into the 'Book of Mourning' in 1845. Situating 'Verses written in sickness' not only within the context of Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley poems, but also Hartley and Henry Nelson Coleridge's poems on child loss, demonstrates the multiplicity of absence in the Coleridge family papers.

Coleridge's poems of self-mourning shed light on the intergenerational dynamics of loss. As a young mother, Coleridge was deeply interested in the growth and development of her children; but within the textual parameters of her poems discussed in this chapter, she expressed anxiety about her projected absence. Other maternal dynamics, such as Coleridge's relationship with her mother, also emerge in these poems. While Coleridge wrote a great deal about her own children, she also wrote about her position as Sarah Fricker Coleridge's daughter. This intergenerational aspect of her writing (and audience) informed her mourning process. Coleridge mourned her family members both from the perspective of a mother and a daughter. The next chapter builds upon this idea by exploring the significance of dead mothers in *Phantasmion*. It argues that Coleridge used the materiality of death to think about maternal absence and presence.

Chapter 2: (Un)Dead Mothers and Putrefaction in Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion* (1837)

This chapter explores the narrative function of putrefaction and (un)dead mothers in Sara Coleridge's fantasy novel, *Phantasmion* (1837). I use the term '(un)dead' as the mothers of the two main characters, Phantasmion and Princess Iarine, die only to return. The novel, which was revised during Coleridge's convalescence at Ilchester in 1836, centres on Phantasmion, Prince of Palmland, who is given the power to transform into a variety of insects by the fairy Potentilla. He embarks on a quest to deliver his beloved Princess Iarine from evil and defeat his nemesis, Glandreth of Rockland, who seeks to invade Palmland. In its analysis of (un)dead mothers, this chapter highlights the intergenerational significance of loss. Intergenerational loss is a central facet of Coleridge's writing and thought: it informed her 1830s poems to and for children, her correspondence and journals, and her prose. This chapter builds upon the ideas stated in Chapter 1 by exploring themes of maternal death in *Phantasmion*.

I will argue that Coleridge uses the materiality of death as a means of interrogating maternal absence. The novel is replete with death and loss. Phantasmion's first encounter with a corpse occurs in the palace garden; the corpse of his mother, Queen Zalia, is disinterred by Glandreth of Rockland; and Princess Iarine tells her younger brother that the 'garments' of the human body will be replaced by the 'finer clothes' of heaven.[235] This chapter will analyse these three episodes, as well as the 'death' of Princess Iarine's mother, Anthemmina, who is presumed to have drowned long ago until it is revealed that she is stranded on the Lost Land, where she starves to death shortly after reuniting with her

[235] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874 [1837]; rpt. London: British Library Historical Print Editions, 2011), p. 134.

daughter. I contend that just as Phantasmion's insect body is a site of material transformation, so too is the human corpse. By this I mean that Coleridge is interested in the transition from human remains to immaterial soul. This in turn sheds light on the idea of the absent presence, insofar as the dead remain present in another form. Building upon my analysis of the 'Book of Mourning' in the introductory chapter, I will argue that Coleridge's account of her mother's corpse reveals the material and spiritual resonances of death. I will suggest that *Phantasmion* anticipates Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' in its representations of (in)corporeal mothers.

By analysing the human corpse, this chapter will redress the balance of critical explorations of Coleridge's interest in the body. While *Phantasmion* remains relatively understudied, scholars have acknowledged its depiction of material transformation. Donelle Ruwe reads *Phantasmion* as an 'opiate narrative' wherein the 'actual material transformations of the protagonist's body from human to insect' blurs with the 'dreamlike scenes of phantasmagoria in which the landscape (and characters) are transformed'.[236] In other words, Coleridge's depiction of the 'intense fluidity of the physical body' acts as a metaphor for the phantasmagoric effects of opium.[237] Jeffrey Barbeau similarly notes that Coleridge associated *Phantasmion* 'with a sort of madness', citing her description of it as 'a string of waking dreams' in a letter to John Pridham as evidence.[238] Though I agree that Coleridge's period of ill health influenced her writing, I aim to extend these critical arguments by focusing specifically on dead bodies. My aim is to broaden scholarly readings of *Phantasmion*—and Coleridge's interest in bodily transformation overall—beyond her

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[236] Donelle Ruwe, '*Phantasmion*, or the Confessions of a Female Opium Eater', in *Material Transgressions: Beyond Romantic Bodies, Genders, Things*, ed. by Kate Singer, Ashley Cross, and Suzanne L. Barnett (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 275-296 (p. 276).
[237] Donelle Ruwe, '*Phantasmion*, or the Confessions of a Female Opium Eater', p. 276.
[238] Jeffrey Barbeau, *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 63; Sara Coleridge, 'To John Pridham', 18 September 1844, in *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Peter Swaab (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 16.

opium use. In so doing this chapter seeks to show how Coleridge's representations of bodies reflects the broader themes of death, absence, and loss in *Phantasmion*.

This chapter draws upon studies of the Romantic body politic. In their introduction to *Material Transgressions: Beyond Romantic Bodies, Genders, Things* (2020) Kate Singer, Ashley Cross and Suzanne Barnett address the fluidity of the Romantic body. With reference to gender and affect theory, they highlight the 'transgressive materiality' of bodies. By this they mean that in Romantic period literature, the body is not fixed: rather, it blurs the boundaries between human, animal, and 'it'. For instance, in their brief discussion of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Singer, Cross and Barnett argue that the Creature transgresses material and ontological boundaries as he is composed of different body parts:

> …Shelley and other Romantic writers not only pursue ideology critique but also explore alternative understandings of materiality as fluid, unstable, and affective, understandings that move beyond concepts that fix gendered bodies and intellectual capacities, whether human or textual. Such materialities we define as transgressive, in the sense that they move beyond prescribed limits, stepping across or removing a distance between, breaking, violating, infringing, contravening, trespassing, exceeding those boundaries never really created but already intra-mingling their own dynamic parts.[239]

Their articulation of a 'transgressive materiality' is particularly relevant to my reading of *Phantasmion*, in which bodies shift not only between human and insect, but also between living and dead. This chapter broadens the scope of 'transgressive materialities' by including

[239] Kate Singer, Ashley Cross, and Suzanne L. Barnett, 'Introduction: Living in a New Material Word', in *Material Transgressions: Beyond Romantic Bodies, Genders, Things*, ed. by Kate Singer, Ashley Cross, and Suzanne L. Barnett (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 1-30 (p. 3).

dead bodies within its remit. In so doing this chapter identifies death and absence as central themes in Coleridge's novel.

As well as studies of the body politic, this chapter also draws upon analyses of dead matter. Margaret Schwartz applies Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the 'assemblage'—a term used to define the fluidity of matter—to her study of human corpses. While the 'deceased' refers to a dead individual, the 'corpse' refers to the material body left behind. As such, '[i]n the flesh…the corpse differs as much as it resembles'.[240] Both human and 'it', the corpse unsettles ontological boundaries. This disturbance is evident in Coleridge's descriptions of her mother's corpse in the 'Book of Mourning' as well as in her correspondence. Although Coleridge began the 'Book of Mourning' in 1843, six years after the publication of *Phantasmion*, her response to seeing the dead bodies of her husband and mother has some bearing on Phantasmion's attitude towards the corpse of his mother, as well as Princess Iarine's ideas about the materiality of human bodies. I will argue that Coleridge's visceral descriptions of corpses in both *Phantasmion* and the 'Book of Mourning' suggest a continued fascination with the materiality of death. This chapter uses previously unpublished excerpts from the 'Book of Mourning' to illustrate Coleridge's interest in material decay.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, 'Death', is divided into three subsections. It uses a selection of unpublished manuscripts from Coleridge's archive dating from the 1830s to the early to mid-1840s. In so doing it aims to contextualise Coleridge's interest in decomposition. Section 1.1a, 'Sara Coleridge and the Materiality of Death', provides an overview of cultural and theological notions of dead bodies in the nineteenth-century. It will draw attention to Coleridge's consciousness of the materiality of her own body as well as others—namely, the corpses of her husband and mother, which are

[240] Margaret Schwartz, *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 5.

described in her unpublished correspondence and 'Book of Mourning'. Section 1.1b, 'Princess Iarine and the 'Garment' of the Human Body' extends my analysis in section 1.1a by arguing that Princess Iarine draws upon theological conceptions of matter in her dialogue on death. Section 1.1c, 'The Death of Phantasmion's Mother', discusses Phantasmion's sudden initiation into the materiality of death in the opening chapters of the novel. I will suggest that putrefaction was integral to Coleridge's understanding of material transformation.

The second section, 'Return', is divided into two subsections and focuses on the implications of mothers returning from the dead. Section 2.1a, 'The Disinterment of Phantasmion's Mother', builds upon this argument by exploring Queen Zalia's brief return in spirit form after Glandreth's army disinter her corpse. I will read the disinterment scene in relation to contemporaneous debates about the efficacy of the rural churchyard—namely Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs* (1810)—to suggest that disinterment threatens the affective tie between dead mother and child, insofar as Queen Zalia's corpse is uprooted from its burial site. Section 2.1b, 'The 'Death' of Anthemmina' reads Princess Iarine's mother in relation to 'spectral motherhood', a term put forward by Marilyn Francus to describe fictional mothers who move between presence and absence.[241] I will argue that Anthemmina embodies spectral maternity as she is presumed dead. The overall aim of this chapter, then, is to uncover how the materiality of death offers an avenue through which Coleridge can explore different forms of absence.

1. Death

The first section of this chapter assesses how the materiality of death was conceived of in nineteenth-century culture. As Deborah Lutz has observed, 'Victorians expressed a desire to

[241] Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, p. 11.

touch the death that surrounds life, to feel its presence as material and spiritual'.[242] This included preserving material relics such as teeth, bones, and hair, as well as textual artefacts like commonplace books by and related to the deceased. The Coleridge family participated in this material culture of death, as is evidenced by the family hair collection cited in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Section 1.1a uses a selection of unpublished manuscripts in Coleridge's archive dating from the 1830s to the early to mid-1840s. These manuscripts highlight the environment of illness in which *Phantasmion* was composed as well as Coleridge's reactions to the putrefying corpses of her husband and mother recorded in the 'Book of Mourning'. By integrating this manuscript material into my analysis of *Phantasmion*, I aim to show how Coleridge's ideas of materiality and bodily transformation was influenced by cultural and theological conceptions of decomposition. I will suggest that the materiality of death offers a new way of thinking about absent presences in Coleridge's writing, where bodies change from material remains to immaterial soul. Sections 1b and 1c apply this understanding of the materiality of death by tracing a rhetoric of decay in Princess Iarine's dialogue on death as well as Queen Zalia's passing in the opening chapters of the novel.

1.1a. Sara Coleridge and the Materiality of Death

This section explores the cultural and theological conception of human bodies in the nineteenth-century. As Coleridge was deeply religious, and the death culture in which she participated in was largely dictated by theological principles, this section will highlight the spiritual concerns that death raised at the time—especially regarding matter, materiality, and the soul. Her correspondence during her convalescence at Ilchester reveals her keen awareness of the materiality of her own body. Furthermore, her previously unpublished letters

[242] Deborah Lutz, 'The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 127-142 (p. 137).

from the period of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's death in 1845, as well as her entries in the 'Book of Mourning', provide further evidence of her interest in decomposition. The aim of this section, then, is to contextualise Coleridge's interest in material decay and transformation. This idea of material transformation has some bearing on the absent presence, insofar as the spirit of the deceased lingers while the corporeal remains decompose. As such, Queen Zalia, Anthemmina, and Sarah Fricker Coleridge remain present even when they are physically absent. This in turn builds upon my previous suggestion that Coleridge wrote not only as a mother but as a daughter.

The first half of this section outlines how Coleridge's understanding of the materiality of her own body was shaped by the theological principles of matter and spirit. A brief outline of the circumstances in which *Phantasmion* was composed and revised suggests that bodily pain and the likelihood of an early death were at the forefront of Coleridge's mind. Informed by this context, I will then consider the ways in which the corpse was regarded as 'waste matter'. I trace this rhetoric of waste in a selection of unpublished entries in the 'Book of Mourning', which includes detailed accounts of the corpses of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge. I will situate Coleridge's reactions to their remains within the context of the nineteenth-century cultural ideal of 'good' and 'bad' deaths. Although the 'Book of Mourning' was begun in 1843, six years after the publication of *Phantasmion*, I will argue that both are concerned with the transitional state of death. This idea of the spiritual presence of the dead informs my textual analysis of Princess Iarine, Queen Zalia, and Anthemmina, discussed in sections 1b, 1c, 2a, and 2b of this chapter.

The circumstances in which *Phantasmion* was written sheds light on Coleridge's preoccupation with materiality. Coleridge held a deep interest in the relationship between the body and the mind, as is evidenced in her essay 'On Nervousness', which I outlined in Chapter One. The revision history of *Phantasmion* has since become ingrained in the Sara

Coleridge mythology. In August 1836, Coleridge visited relatives in Ottery St. Mary with Herbert and Edith. Two months later they began the return journey to London, but once they had reached Ilchester Coleridge informed Henry Nelson Coleridge that she could no longer 'proceed with my journey'.[243] It was at Ilchester where Coleridge revised *Phantasmion*. While this episode points to the significance of illness in Coleridge's personal life and literary career, it also reveals Coleridge's understanding of the materiality of bodies and death. Writing to Henry Nelson Coleridge from Ilchester on 10 November 1836, Coleridge pleads with him not to force her into an 'invalid carriage'. This letter, which has not been published in its entirety, shows how she thought about the materiality of the body as opposed to the immateriality of the divine. She pleads:

> O who will deliver me from this body ^of^ death! How indeed I do intensely long, like my poor father, to have my imprisoned ^spirit^ released from this tabernacle of weakness & misery, and yet, such are the bonds of the flesh, I cannot contemplate the prospect of death with composure.[244]

The reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge here establishes a personal and thematic affinity between their suffering bodies. In *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality and Religion* (1825), which Henry Nelson and Sara Coleridge were editing at the time of *Phantasmion*'s publication, Samuel Taylor Coleridge refers to 'our earthly tabernacle'.[245] Within the context of Coleridge's period at Ilchester, the 'bonds of flesh' point to a parasitic relationship between the material body and the immaterial soul.

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[243] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 16 October 1836, qtd. in *Sara Coleridge: A Victorian Daughter,* p. 89.
[244] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 10 November 1836. Harry Ransom Center.
[245] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 4th edn (London: William Pickering, 1839), p. 245.

Religious dogma differentiated between the materiality of bodies and the immateriality of the divine. The body was often referred to as 'clay', 'clod', or a 'tabernacle', suggesting that it was a temporary shell. Upon death the soul would be freed, leaving the body to decompose. In her study of corpses in the Early-Modern period, Sarah Tarlow observes that '[i]n theological discourse…the body without the soul is worthless and despicable matter'.[246] This idea of the corpse as waste matter has informed literary analyses. Sophie Gee's analysis of Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) posits that 'the unceremonious burials caused people to realize how disturbing, how uncanny, is the spectacle of fleshly decay'.[247] Although Gee focuses specifically on the contexts of the 1665 plague, this conception of the body as waste continued into the nineteenth-century. However, as Ruth Richardson notes in her study of the 1832 Anatomy Act—which granted medical professionals authorisation to dissect corpses for academic purposes—the 'physical pathology of putrefaction' was 'counterpoised by a profound conception of the corpse's metaphysical attributes'.[248] This in turn imbued the corpse with ontological uncertainty:

> If the soul left the body at death and migrated to its heavenly resting place, there would exist the danger that, disembodied, it could remain hovering around the haunts of the living. If on the other hand, it slept in the grave, then it would somehow be present in or near the body after death. In either case, awareness of the corpse's uncertain metaphysical nature could relate to a belief that an individual's 'nonmaterial component' could retain its attachment to the body for an unspecified period after death.[249]

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[246] Sarah Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early-Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 28.
[247] Sophie Gee, *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 114.
[248] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*, 2nd edn (London: Phoenix Press, 1988), p. 15.
[249] Ibid., p. 16.

The uncertainty of the human corpse is apparent in Coleridge's writings. Specifically, Coleridge is interested in the transitional state between matter and soul. This supplied an avenue through which she could speculate about the presence of the dead. Moreover, Coleridge's later accounts of the deaths of her husband and mother in the 'Book of Mourning' reflects the unease with which individuals responded to decomposition in the nineteenth-century, despite an increasingly 'sentimental' view of death which aimed to strip the corpse of its putridness.[250]

Coleridge's unpublished correspondence about the death of her mother provides evidence of the 'disturbing' spectacle of putrefaction. Writing to her brother-in-law John Taylor Coleridge a day after Fricker Coleridge's death, Coleridge describes the change in her mother's countenance:

> What a host of common remembrances thoughts & feelings of long and gradual growth perishes with her! There is little comfort to me in looking at the dear remains. That is not the face I ever saw in her – no – in her deathiest looking – wannest moments – then there was life – now there is nothing but death – it is not even her body it is mere clay. The mouth too disturbs me. Henry's mouth was beautified in death – & though it was but a mask that I looked at still it was one full of harmony & beauty. All the upper part of my mother's face is sweet too.[251]

Nineteenth-century responses to decomposition anticipate Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'abject'—which describes feelings of disgust and repulsion—insofar as the corpse is regarded as 'the most sickening of wastes'.[252] Coleridge's description of Fricker Coleridge's corpse

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[250] Ibid., p. 17.
[251] Sara Coleridge, 'To John Taylor Coleridge', 26 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 7.3-8.1).
[252] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

subscribes to this view, as 'it is not even her body it is mere clay'. She was evidently disturbed by Fricker Coleridge's mouth: in an unpublished letter to her brother Derwent, Coleridge writes that 'The men are coming to close up the remains – I have not looked at them today – as there is a change in the mouth'.[253] This is in sharp contrast to Henry Nelson Coleridge's corpse. In an unpublished entry in the 'Book of Mourning' dated 27 January 1843, Coleridge notes that her husband's 'face looked beautiful with a placid smilingness'.[254] The Evangelical idea of the 'good death', influenced by the late medieval tradition of the *ars moriendi*, informed the grieving and dying processes. However, as Pat Jalland points out, reactions to death were varied.[255] Coleridge's responses to the bodies of her mother and husband—one 'mere clay', the other 'beautified'—attests to this variation. I will argue that Coleridge's representation of corpses in *Phantasmion* align with her accounts of Fricker Coleridge's dead body, insofar as they evoke feelings of repulsion. Although Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge died after the publication of *Phantasmion*, I would argue that it too presents the corpse in proto-abject terms, an idea I take forward in section 2.1a of this chapter.

In her study of memorials, Tarlow argues that where symbolic representations of putrefaction dominated late medieval and Early-Modern material culture, 'by the nineteenth century the dead and decaying body is almost entirely absent from the ordinary practices of death and life'.[256] In her estimation, the frequent allusions to death as 'rest' and 'sleep' imply that by the nineteenth-century mourners focused on the 'emotional connections of the individual commemorated'.[257] While I agree that grief had become more personalized in this

[253] Sara Coleridge, 'To Derwent Coleridge', 27 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 5.1-5.3).
[254] Sara Coleridge, 'Book of Mourning', 27 January 1843. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.1).
[255] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 38.
[256] Sarah Tarlow, 'Wormie Decay and Blessed Sleep: Death and disgust in later historic Britain', in *Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain*, ed. by Sarah Tarlow and Susie West (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 183-198 (p. 183).
[257] Ibid., p. 189.

period, Coleridge's unpublished accounts of the bodies of her husband and mother in the 'Book of Mourning' suggest that putrefaction was not entirely absent in nineteenth-century memorial culture. Rather, the corpses of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge become a locus of memorialisation. By this I mean that Coleridge draws comparisons between their remains and what they were like while living. The 'dark colour' and 'narrow look that…completely altered the aspect' of Henry Nelson Coleridge's body was replaced by a 'sweet countenance', with Derwent allegedly remarking that 'he knew not he had so handsome a nose'.[258] Henry Nelson Coleridge's corpse thus acts as a tangible memento of 'the partner of my heart for 20 years', a reminder of the past they shared as well as their affection.[259] In another unpublished account in the 'Book of Mourning', Coleridge writes of her mother that,

> It was most strange, most awful, to see the face that had once been hers in that fixed fearful stillness of death—For she was never still in life—if a grave thought possessed her mind for a moment it was soon chased away. She was all mobility—now fixed like a frozen rivulet.[260]

In this instance, the fixed 'stillness of death' becomes a means of remembering Fricker's energetic 'mobility'. Coleridge did not always describe putrefaction in her correspondence and 'Book of Mourning': indeed, she often simply recorded the deceased person's name and manner of death, with a second-hand account of their dying moments. However, her records about Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge demonstrate a fascination with—if not troubled response to—the material reality of death. This interest in putrefaction and material decay is especially useful in my discussion of *Phantasmion*, where dead and rotting bodies proliferate.

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[258] Sara Coleridge, 'Book of Mourning', 27 January 1843. Harry Ransom Center ((MS-0866, container 1.1).
[259] Ibid., 26 January 1843.
[260] Ibid., 27 September 1845.

D.B. Ruderman's suggestion that Coleridge numbered 'the dead with the living' in her 'Book of Mourning' is symptomatic of wider mourning practices in the nineteenth-century.[261] Although the mourning process was not homogenous, the pervasive act of collecting material relics associated with the deceased, as well as religious ideas of the soul, implied that the dead were still present. This is evidenced in Coleridge's transcriptions of her mother's Berkeley poems analysed in Chapter One. Recording her husband's funeral service in the 'Book of Mourning', Coleridge wrote that '[w]hen the voice of the minister ceased I drew nearer to the brink of the grave and looked down fixedly into my future home – the receptacle that all that earth will hold of me a few years hence'.[262] She wrote to Derwent Coleridge that Sarah Fricker Coleridge's 'death makes me feel far nearer to the grave than I did before'.[263] While Coleridge recognised that she was physically separated from her deceased loved ones, she looked forward to the time when she would join them. This articulation of death as a temporary separation underlines the plot of *Phantasmion*, where mothers oscillate between life and death. Though Queen Zalia dies in the first chapter, she reappears in spirit form much later in the narrative; Anthemmina, who is presumed dead for most of the narrative, is imprisoned on the Lost Land, with her 'cheeks white as wax, her blue eyes spectrally bright'.[264] The ontological boundaries between the realms of the living and the dead thus intermingle in Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning', correspondence, and *Phantasmion*.

The next section of this chapter applies this understanding of putrefaction and transition to Princess Iarine's dialogue about death. It will read Princess Iarine's articulation of the change from human remains to immaterial soul within the context of the theological

[261] D.B. Ruderman, *The Idea of Infancy in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry: Romanticism, Subjectivity, Form* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 140.
[262] Sara Coleridge, 'Book of Mourning', 2 February 1843. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.1).
[263] Sara Coleridge, 'To Derwent Coleridge', 27 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 5.1-5.3).
[264] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 321.

conception of the human body as 'clay'. In so doing it will highlight the hitherto overlooked spiritual undertones of *Phantasmion*.

1.1b. Princess Iarine and the 'Garment' of the Human Body

While Robin Schofield has argued that Coleridge began 'to form the agenda for her projects in religious writing' from 1837, the spiritual undercurrents of *Phantasmion* (also published in 1837) remain largely unheeded.[265] This section will address this gap in the knowledge by exploring the spiritual ramifications of the corpse in *Phantasmion*. It will consider how Princess Iarine embodies the spiritual undertones of the novel. Building upon my analysis of the materiality of death outlined in section 1.1a of this chapter, I situate Princess Iarine's dialogue about death within the context of Evangelical children's literature, namely Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781). In so doing this section extends critical interpretations of Coleridge's interest in materiality.

In an undated entry in her 'Red Book' of manuscript poems, Coleridge wrote that 'Iarine is an example of the Scriptural saying, *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth!*'[266] In this context 'meek' refers to Christian piety. The characterisation of Princess Iarine's piousness has attracted little scholarly attention. However, I would argue that Coleridge's entry in the 'Red Book' reveals the Christian significance of Princess Iarine and, by extension, the novel itself. Informed by this understanding of Christian virtue, this section will argue that Princess Iarine's dialogue on death with her younger brother Albinet reflects Coleridge's belief that the human body is engaged in a dynamic process of renewal.

Princess Iarine's dialogue with Albinet sheds light on religious conceptions of human cadavers. The dialogue takes place in chapter seventeen. At this point in the narrative,

[265] Robin Schofield, *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion* (Cham: Springer, 2018), p. 10.
[266] Sara Coleridge, 'Moral of 'Phantasmion'', n.d., in *Sara Coleridge: Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter Swaab (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2007), p. 236.

Anthemmina is presumed dead and Albinet's mother Queen Maudra is absent, and so Princess Iarine assumes the role of a maternal pedagogue. This allows her to transmit spiritual ideas of materiality to Albinet. The garland Princess Iarine becomes a means of introducing the concept of death and decay:

> 'Sister,' said the child, 'why wilt thou always wear those cold blue water lilies? Red and yellow flowers are livelier than blue ones.' 'I loved them because my mother loved them,' said Iarine. 'Dost thou think she wears such a crown as this now?' said Albinet, softly, looking up at the sky. 'The flowers she wears,' replied the maiden, 'are such as never fade.' 'Heaven must be very full of flowers,' cried he, 'if new ones come and yet the old ones never go away. I hope it is not like that picture of a sunny garden which never changes; I hope there are half opened buds in heaven, Iarine, and merry milk white lambs.' 'Heaven is happiness,' the maid replied; 'all that can make us happy we shall meet with there.'[267]

Albinet's knowledge of the world is rooted in the material: he thinks of heaven in terms of what makes him happy, like flowers and lambs. In this way Coleridge echoes the hymnal literature of Barbauld, whose *Hymns in Prose for Children* uses the imagery of nature to 'impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind'.[268] In her concluding hymn, Barbauld presents heaven as a place of eternal happiness: 'There is a land, where the roses are without thorns […] In that land, there is eternal spring […] There we shall see Jesus, who is gone before us to that happy place'.[269] By using the natural world as metaphors for material transformation, Coleridge and Barbauld suggest that humans are engaged in a dynamic spiritual process of renewal.

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[267] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 132.
[268] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2002), p. 238.
[269] Ibid., pp. 259-260.

In his analysis of eighteenth-century churchyard poetry, James Metcalf explores the relationship between the material ('earth to earth and dust to dust') and the immaterial (the transition from body to soul). Metcalf notes that the biological process of putrefaction combines 'destruction and construction' as new life, such as worms and fungi, thrive within the deceased body.[270] His analysis of the poetics of dirt is useful for the purposes of this section as it highlights the different materialities and states of being that death incurs. This transitional state between body and soul has some bearing on my discussion of maternal absence insofar as Queen Zalia and Anthemmina are present in another form.

Like Coleridge, Princess Iarine describes the body as a temporary shell. Throughout her correspondence Coleridge posits the human body as a garment to be cast off after death. Writing to Henry Nelson Coleridge from Ilchester, Coleridge explains that 'the tangible frame and the life together constitute the body; it is *my* life, *my* body, not more myself than my clothes'.[271] Coleridge's frequent representations of the human body as a 'garment' in her fiction and correspondence recall Wordsworth's lines on the 'immortal being' in the *Prelude* (1798-1850), which anticipates a time when man 'No more shall need such garments'.[272] Princess Iarine uses similar language during her conversation with Albinet, who momentarily fears for his life after he is attacked by a large bird:

> 'I dreamt that we were in the grave,' said Albinet, roused by his sister from sobbing sleep; 'and I began to cry: but behold, it was only a passage, and there was light at the other end.' 'What have we to do with the grave?' said Iarine, in a sprightly tone: 'we can never be laid under ground, only our worn garments. The earth is nature's wardrobe; for out of it every living thing and

[270] James Metcalf, *Churchyard Poetics: Landscape, Labour, and the Poetics of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), p. 55.
[271] Sara Coleridge, 'To Henry Nelson Coleridge', 27 October 1836, in *Memoir and Letters*, p. 164.
[272] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works,* ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 435 (ln. 23).

> every tree and plant receive apparel. Ere we go hence we must replace our garments in the great receptacle, that the old materials may serve to make new clothes for other creatures.' Albinet looked at his pining limb: 'I will have finer clothes than these in heaven,' he said, 'and as such fit me better.' 'Think of our garden favourite,' said the maid again; 'when the streaked petals and shining leaves and upright stem all disappeared, was the dear lily dead? 'No, no,' she might have cried from under ground, 'though all you ever saw me has gone to dust, yet I am still alive, and soon shall have fresh raiment to appear in; unless the spring proves faithless.' Albinet clasped his sister's hand joyfully: 'We too shall be fresh clothed,' he cried, 'and better clothed, because our spring will be in a far finer soil and climate. Ha, ha! who knows but these bodies of ours may be the bulbs out of which our heavenly bodies are to spring, as that caterpillar is the bulb of a butterfly, and the poor dry acorn of a branching oak?'[273]

Coleridge again echoes Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose.* In Hymn XIV Barbauld writes that 'I have seen the insect, being come to its full size, languish…it spun itself a tomb, and was shrouded in the silken cone…I looked again, it had burst its tomb…Thus shall it be with thee, O man! And so shall thy life be renewed'.[274] More relevant for the purposes of this section is the frequency with which Coleridge refers to the body as a garment in her fiction and correspondence. Coleridge thus compensates for the grotesque reality of decomposition by offering an attractive vision of the afterlife.

Princess Iarine's belief that the 'garment' of the body will be replaced by 'fresh raiment' embodies Michael Wheeler's understanding of the last rites. In his discussion of

[273] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 134.
[274] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, p. 258.

how the final Judgment was conceived in the nineteenth-century, Wheeler observes that death was regarded as a liminal state:

Earthly state Death Intermediate state Resurrection Final state[275]

This transitional state is imbued with religious significance as the body changes from earthly remains to immaterial soul. The idea of a 'new state' emerges in Coleridge's essays and correspondence. Writing to a Miss Morris in 1847, Coleridge refers to the 'new state of existence, a stage of the new birth' attained in heaven.[276] I would argue that a similar rhetoric inflects the narrative of *Phantasmion*, where characters move between different states of being: human to insect (Phantasmion), living to dead (Queen Zalia and Anthemmina), and matter to soul (Anthemmina's dialogue). Coleridge's representation of different materialities is analogous to the different forms of absence that underline the plot of *Phantasmion*.

The next section of this chapter builds upon these ideas of absence and presence by unpacking the significance of Queen Zalia's death in the opening chapters of the novel. I will argue that Phantasmion's sudden initiation into the material reality of death points to the centrality of maternal absence in the novel. In so doing the next section identifies putrefaction as a key aspect of Coleridge's understanding of human bodies.

1.2a. The Death of Phantasmion's Mother

This section analyses the death of Phantasmion's mother, which occurs in the second chapter of the novel. I will argue that Phantasmion's response to the sudden death of his mother—as well as the deaths of his two friends—sheds light on his understanding of the materiality of death and whether the dead remain present. To aid my argument on this point, I will

[275] Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 70.
[276] Sara Coleridge, 'To Miss Morris', 6 October 1847, in *Memoir and Letters, I,* p. 327.

contextualise Phantasmion's abrupt encounter with death within the context of Wordsworth's 'We Are Seven' (1798), in which a little girl denies the reality of death by maintaining affective bonds with her deceased siblings. In so doing this section aims to demonstrate how mother-child relationships are mediated by death in *Phantasmion*. Furthermore, it seeks to consider the ways in which putrefaction was integral to Coleridge's understanding of human bodies.

The novel begins during Phantasmion's childhood, when he observes Potentilla in the Palace Garden. Their first encounter establishes innocence and experience as major themes of the novel. By this I mean that Phantasmion, at this point in the narrative at least, is presented as a child who is ignorant of suffering and death:

> My little Phantasmion, thou needest no fairy now to work wonders for thee, being yet so young that all thou beholdest is new and marvellous in thine eyes. But the day must come when this happiness will fade away; when the stream, less clear than at its outset, will no longer return such bright reflections; then, if thou wilt repair to this pomegranate tree, and call upon the name of Potentilla, I will reappear before thee, and exert all my power to renew the delights and wonders of thy childhood.[277]

Coleridge here alludes to the vision of childhood put forth by Wordsworth in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1802-1804; pub. 1807), which begins with the poet recalling 'a time when meadow/grove and stream…To me did seem/Apparelled in celestial delight'.[278] However, while Potentilla prophesies a time 'when this happiness will fade away', Phantasmion loses his mother a mere two pages later. As such

[277] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 3.
[278] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works,* p. 297 (lns. 1-4).

Phantasmion is still a child when he is confronted by this loss, rather than an adult whose 'bright reflections' have gradually faded away.

In the second chapter Phantasmion faces three losses—those of his mother, a little boy, and his friend Dariel of Tigridia—thereby establishing death as a central catalyst for the plot. Phantasmion is playing with the little child when a gardener informs him of his mother's death. The passage below sheds light on Phantasmion's understanding of death:

> At last they [Phantasmion and the little child] entered the queen's pleasure ground, where only one gardener remained, and he was sitting on the path, gathering berries in a basket. 'Where is my mother?' cried the prince, leaping suddenly behind him; 'hast thou hidden her away, old man?' 'Thy mother is dead!' answered he, looking up in the boy's face; and it was the glance of his eye, more than the words he spoke, which made Phantasmion shudder…'How darest thou say that my mother is dead?' rejoined the boy, with a tremulous laugh; 'can I see the cloud of yesterday in yon clear sky? like clouds the dead vanish away, and we see them no more.'[279]

Phantasmion does not register his mother's death because he cannot 'see' her. This in turn suggests that a child's notion of death is based on visual perception. A brief acknowledgement of Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' (1798) is useful here. The poem describes an encounter with the adult speaker and a 'cottage Girl' who lives near a rural churchyard. Though two of her siblings are dead, the girl insists that 'Seven are we'. To the perplexity of the adult speaker, the girl insists that 'Their graves are green, they may be seen'.[280] For Katey Castellano, Wordsworth's 'graveyard incorporates life and death, presence and absence in

[279] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 6.
[280] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works,* pp. 83-84 (lns. 5; 18; 37).

order to unite the family'.[281] In other words, the sight of the graves proves to the girl that her dead siblings are still present. Phantasmion is the counterpart to Wordsworth's cottage girl insofar as visual perception determines his understanding of death, but whereas the cottage girl uses her siblings' graves as evidence of their continued presence, Phantasmion initially refuses to acknowledge that presence altogether. As such Phantasmion embodies Wordsworth's description of 'We are Seven' as a poem that highlights 'the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion'.[282] Hence, while Phantasmion and the cottage girl articulate different responses to death, their understanding of it is determined by whether the deceased remain 'present'.

Phantasmion is only able to register death when he sees a corpse. However, even when he discovers the body of his playmate, he initially fails to recognise that he is dead. This scene enacts what Beatrice Turner has termed 'an enforced initiation into experience', suggesting that one's familiarity with death can be violent and sudden:[283]

> Just then he spied the young child lying down, with the fruit-branch dropping out of his fingers, and his face buried in a flowery tuft. 'What! hiding among the hearts-ease?' cried he; 'ah! let me hide too.' Then, putting his face close to that of his charge, 'How cold the little cheek is!' he cried; 'come, raise it up to the warm sun.' Hearing these words the gardener turned the child's face upwards, and behold he was dead; his lips smeared with berry juice, and his pale swollen cheeks covered with purple spots! Then he held out the body to the startled boy, and showing the slack limbs and glazed eye, while his own shot fire like that of a panther:— 'So look the dead,' cried he, 'ere they vanish

[281] Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 40.
[282] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' in *Lyrical Ballads*, *with Pastoral and Other Poems, in two volumes. Vol. I*, 3rd edn (London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1802), pp. i-lxiv (p. xiii).
[283] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, 123.

> away: just so Queen Zalia is looking!' Phantasmion shrieked, and hastening home, he met his mother's funeral procession going forth from the palace. The body was wrapped in a shroud, and black plumes nodded over the face; but he saw the dead hands, and the limbs stretched upon the bier.

Where Phantasmion first refuses to acknowledge death, the materiality of the dead body brings it into sharp focus, as the sight of the child's 'slack limbs' and his mother's 'dead hands' introduce him to the corporeal fact of death. Here Coleridge reinforces the idea that visual perception determines a child's understanding of death, as the sight of the lifeless limbs prompts Phantasmion to (slowly) acknowledge the loss of his mother.

It is significant that Phantasmion's first encounter with dead bodies occurs in the palace garden, as it is a space of both loss and renewal. Shortly after his father, King Dorimant, eats poisoned honey, Phantasmion and Dariel stop to admire a fruit tree when,

> …several scorpions fastened all at once on Dariel's sandaled foot, and stung it with such violence, that, quitting his comrade's arm, he sprang into the air, and then fell prostrate under the towering lilies. Phantasmion carried him to the palace, and placed him tenderly on a couch. After a time, seeing that he continued in a languishing state, he made an infusion of the leaves which his friend had so highly extolled, and silently gave it to Dariel instead of the drink which the physician had ordered; but, just as he expected to see the poor youth revived by this kind act, his head sank on the pillow, a blue tinge stole over his cheek, and when the prince had gazed upon his altered face for a few minutes, he plainly saw that it told no longer of sickness, but of death. Not, however, till decay had wrought a more ghastly change in Dariel's comely countenance, Phantasmion quitted the side of his couch; then, overpowered with sorrow, he

> roamed abroad, and sought the forest of lilies which his comrade's hand had reared: the sun was bright, the air fresh, but all that flowery multitude was drooping and ready to perish; cankerworms had gnawed their roots, and the wondrous plant itself had been attacked by such numbers of insects that scarce a trace of it remained.[284]

In a grotesque imitation of Dariel's death, cankerworms and scorpions begin to destroy the palace garden. On a microcosmic level, then, the palace garden reflects the novel's interest in material decay. The palace garden has dual significance in the novel. While it is associated with loss and death, it is also a space of material transformation, for shortly after Dariel's death Potentilla endows Phantasmion with 'wings of golden green adorned with black embroidery' so that 'he might once more behold that heavenly face [Queen Zalia's] if he could but soar aloft'.[285] Coleridge's representation of the palace garden as a space of death and transformation resembles John Milton's portrayal of Eden in *Paradise Lost* (1667), which is described as both a 'delicious Paradise' and 'grotesque'.[286] Just as Eden manifests the tension between virtue and sin, so too does the palace garden mirror Phantasmion's first encounter with death. Read in this light, the deaths that occur within the environs of the palace garden sets the scene for the events that are to follow. Section 2 begins with a brief overview of the theological imperatives of returning from the dead. This will inform my reading of the disinterment of Queen Zalia (section 2.1a) and the brief return of Anthemmina (section 2.1b).

2. Return

[284] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 8.
[285] Ibid., p. 11; p. 10.
[286] John Milton, *Paradise Lost: Authoritative Text, Sources, and Background Criticism*, ed. by Gordon Teskey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 81 (lns. 132; 137).

This section explores the concept of returning from the dead as it relates to the events in *Phantasmion*. As Lutz observes in her study of nineteenth-century mourning culture, '[b]elieving that spirits might float around or return to the spaces associated with their living and dying selves meant that in such places—and in the thingness of them—might be found their presence'.[287] In other words, material relics associated with the deceased helped to preserve their memory and legacy. The Catholic concept of purgatory stipulated that after death the spirit would remain in purgatory until the Last Judgment. Coleridge criticised Catholicism, particularly the emergence of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, who advocated a middle-way between Anglicanism and Catholicism. For Coleridge, the Oxford Movement was too austere: she disagreed with their notion of baptismal sin, which argued that all infants who died before baptism would be damned. Although Coleridge observed that 'the notion of a purgatory [...] is the natural and necessary pendant to [the Tractarian] scheme', the notion that the dead lingered in another form is not specific to Catholicism.[288] Though Coleridge did not subscribe to the Catholic faith, her writings reveal a deep interest in absent presences. Sections 2.1a and 2.1b of this chapter build upon this idea by analysing the brief returns of Queen Zalia and Anthemmina.

The returns of Queen Zalia and Anthemmina differ in circumstance. Queen Zalia returns in spirit form in chapter 28, after Glandreth's army disinters her corpse with the intention of burning her remains. She returns as a spirit after Phantasmion rescues her coffin. I draw upon studies of nineteenth-century burial rituals in my discussion of Queen Zalia's disinterment to suggest that the removal of a body from its place of rest threatens the 'transmortal' bond between Phantasmion and Queen Zalia.[289] By contrast, Anthemmina is

[287] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 124.
[288] Sara Coleridge, qtd. in Robin Schofield, *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion*, p. 84.
[289] Kurt Fosso, *Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bonds of Mourning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 6.

presumed dead. Despite the different circumstances that lead to their return, both Queen Zalia and Anthemmina occupy a liminal state between life and death. This liminality points to their transitional materiality as they move from dead matter to spirit (Queen Zalia) and from dying to dead (Anthemmina). Moreover, their return signifies that dead or otherwise absent mothers remain present. Sections 2.1a and 2.1b thus aim to demonstrate the significance of absent presences in *Phantasmion*.

2.1a. The Disinterment of Phantasmion's Mother

Despite the volume of inter-disciplinary studies of the corpse, few have considered the narrative function of disinterment beyond Gothic fiction, which is replete with body-snatchers and scenes of anatomical dissection. The exhumation of Queen Zalia, which takes place near the end of the novel, has received little scholarly attention. Yet, as I will suggest in this section, it speaks to two major themes of the novel: material transformation and loss. I will argue that the disinterment of Queen Zalia threatens the affective ties between mother and son. My argument is informed by contemporaneous debates about memorialisation, which stipulated that the burial ground mediated an emotional connection between the living and the dead. The second half of this section will then analyse Phantasmion's successful interception of Glandreth's plan to burn Queen Zalia's remains. I will argue that, while Queen Zalia's disinterment jeopardizes her memory, her return in spirit form facilitates an affective reunion between mother and son. The aim of this section, then, is to situate the death and disinterment of Queen Zalia within the context of nineteenth-century burial culture. In so doing it seeks to highlight how Coleridge's representation of the absent presence is symptomatic of a broader culture of mourning. Nineteenth-century theology dictated that when an individual died, their soul flew to another sphere of existence as their

corpse decayed. This understanding is perceptible in Coleridge's depiction of Queen Zalia, who transitions from dead body to living spirit.

There are numerous historical studies of the function of burials and epitaphs. Robert Pogue Harrison's *Dominion of the Dead* (2003) explores how dead bodies shape culture. Harrison points out that the Latin term *humus*, meaning 'ground', is etymologically related to 'humanity'. The commemorative marker 'here lies' therefore mediates 'the bonds of community among the living and the bonds of community with the dead'.[290] The significance of the burial site—and where and how the dead should be buried—came under further scrutiny in the nineteenth-century with the introduction of sanitary reforms and urban cemeteries.[291] Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs* (1810) favours the rural churchyard over the urban one. Wordsworth believed that rural cemeteries were a 'visible centre of a community of the living and the dead; a point to which are habitually referred the nearest concerns of both'.[292] The notion that burial mediates the relationship between the living and the dead is discussed at length by Mary Hotz, whose extensive study of Victorian burial reform argues that 'the corpse serves to redefine existing notions of community and history'. Like Harrison, Hotz explores the ways in which the graveyard brings together local communities.[293] However, disinterment challenges the Wordsworthian articulation of communality because the body's connection to the land, which the *Essays Upon Epitaphs* had argued was so crucial to the living's familiarity with the dead, is unsettled when a corpse is removed from its place of rest.

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[290] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. xi; p. 155.
[291] Peter Thorsheim, 'The Corpse in the Garden: Burial, Health, and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century London', *Environmental History*, 16, (2011), 38-68 (p. 41; p. 47).
[292] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, II*, ed. by W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 56.
[293] Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 11.

Burial was conceived as a way of maintaining an emotional connection with the deceased. Writing to Aubrey de Vere seven months before her death, Coleridge remarked that '[y]ou can hardly imagine how my mind hovers about that old well-known churchyard [St Kentigern's, Crosthwaite], with Skiddaw and the Bassenthwaite hills in sight'.[294] She hoped that she would be able deposit her mother's remains from Highgate to the Lake District, to be in close proximity with the Southey family in death (a plan that never came to fruition). The graveyard had affective potential: as Kurt Fosso remarks in his examination of Wordsworth's sepulchral poetics, the rural cemetery facilitated 'a schema for community, organized around the dead' where the 'deceased are an integral part of the locale's history, affections, and environment'.[295] This is evident in Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, which advocates the use of monuments that unite 'the two worlds of the living and the dead by their appropriate affections'.[296] This idealisation of the cemetery has some bearing on my analyses of the return of the dead. Spatially, mourners return to the burial site to pay their respects to the dead; on a metaphorical level, the cemetery establishes a 'transmortal community' wherein the memory of the dead remains present.[297]

The disinterment of Queen Zalia takes place late in the novel, when Glandreth and his army begin to march into Palmland. Potentilla appears before Phantasmion in Gemmaura, where the prince had journeyed to rally troops in the war against Glandreth. Potentilla then informs Phantasmion of his mother's disinterment:

> 'Not far from hence,' rejoined Potentilla, 'is the mansion where thy mother used to dwell with Cyradis, her guardian. After marriage Zalia loved to revisit the spot, and see her little son gambol in those green haunts where she herself had sported when a child; and here in her death-sickness she desired to be

[294] Sara Coleridge, 'To Aubrey de Vere', 1 October 1851, in *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, pp. 418-419.
[295] Kurt Fosso, *Buried Communities*, p. 128.
[296] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, II*, p. 60.
[297] Kurt Fosso, *Buried Communities*, p. 6.

> buried, feeling like one who longs to lie down in the old accustomed chamber. Her ancient friend survived till an hour ago, but Glandreth and his savage band have murdered him.' […] 'It was rumoured,' said the Fairy, 'that he possessed a treasure, and was acquainted with rich mines. And so they pierced him with spears, on the tomb of his beloved pupil, which he daily visited; then digging into the ground, discovered no precious stones or metals, but thy mother's coffin, which they are even now carrying away into Palmland. For Glandreth declares that he will hold a solemn feast and burn the relics of Dorimant and Zalia, before all the people, as a sign that the old race of the Palmland kings is utterly abolished.'[298]

This passage reveals the ways in which burial maintains connections with the past, as is evidenced by Queen Zalia's wish to be buried in one of the 'green haunts' she used to frequent in her youth. Coleridge's language here is not too dissimilar to her later comments about being buried next to the Southey family in the Lake District. While Coleridge's preparations for her burial place took place over a decade after the publication of *Phantasmion*, it too is concerned with how the burial ground establishes a continuum between past and present. This transmortal bond is, however, threatened by Glandreth, who plans to eliminate the 'old race' of Palmland by destroying their remains. Queen Zalia's burial site is thus a space of loss not only because it is her place of rest but, crucially, because her remains are disinterred. Within the context of the novel, then, Queen Zalia's disinterment serves to rupture Phantasmion's connection with and knowledge of his mother's past.

Although Queen Zalia's disinterment jeopardizes the transmortal bonds of the burial ground, a relationship is nevertheless established between the dead Queen Zalia and living

[298] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, pp. 292-293.

Phantasmion. The materiality of Queen Zalia's corpse influences the materiality of Phantasmion's insect body. Upon learning of Glandreth's plan to disinter his mother's corpse, Phantasmion swears that 'he would do and be and suffer anything, if he might stop his enemies in their outrageous career'. Potentilla then transforms him into a giant warrior ant, removing 'every vestige of his human form' so that he can dig a cavity to ensnare Glandreth's soldiers:

> Within a few seconds of each other all arrived at the abyss which gaped to receive them. At the edge of it they rushed upon a loose bank of pebbles and sand, thrown up by the fabricator: against this the horses stumbled, and, losing their balance, fell headlong into the trap. The men behind wondered to see them suddenly disappear in the distance, and strained their eyes to look after them. It was quite dark ere the company that brought the coffin reached the pitfall, so that, leisurely as they came, all rolled over the shelf and joined their comrades in the hollow. There the mingled crowd were lying crushed and mangled, with broken arms, legs, ribs, and sculls, some over their steeds and some under them, while those horses which still had power to move kicked and plunged and trode their masters to atoms.[299]

Here Coleridge anticipates the abject insofar as bodies become sources of disgust and horror, as is evidenced in her description of the 'mangled' soldiers. Phantasmion's insect body is likewise described in abject terms: 'Miserable man that I am', he cries, 'or rather miserable spirit of a man, imprisoned in a frightful crust, to what dire extremity have I been driven mad by rage!'[300] While Coleridge signals the 'extremity' of vengeance to her young readers, Phantasmion's 'frightful crust' also indicates her interest in the proximity between material

[299] Ibid., p. 295.
[300] Ibid., pp. 296-297.

transformation and material decay. Phantasmion buries himself underground to trap his enemies; that Potentilla covers him with 'common soil' further points to the sepulchral significance of Phantasmion's insect body. This is reinforced by Phantasmion's rescue of his mother's coffin and intention 'to gain the shelter of some rocks, and there to find at once a death-bed and sepulchre'.[301] Phantasmion's material transformation into an insect, and his intention to seek vengeance against Glandreth's army, provides the stimulus for his mother's return in spirit form.

Ruwe's observation that Phantasmion's insect metamorphoses is 'instigated by the loss of his mother' points to the significance of maternal absence in the novel.[302] However, while Phantasmion's fluid materiality has been acknowledged by Ruwe and others, little has been said of Queen Zalia's materiality. Yet, just like Phantasmion, Queen Zalia's materiality is unstable, as she changes from living mother to human remains until she finally returns in spirit form:

> …what pale shadowy form is that which occupies [Potentilla's] place, and gazes with such melancholy tenderness on the renovated youth? Phantasmion looking intently before him remembers the fair and gentle countenance of his mother. An hour ago how ill could he have brought to mind the face of Zalia; that face which, ever beaming in his presence with maternal love, had been to his young mind the very symbol of maternity. Now he not only recognised her features, but saw his childish self placed outwardly before him. The time when he lay in sickness on his little couch, and saw that soft mild countenance still shining in betwixt delirious dreams, now occupied his mind with such intensity, that all which had since occurred seemed dim and faint in

[301] Ibid., p. 297.
[302] Donelle Ruwe '*Phantasmion*, or the Confessions of a Female Opium Eater', p. 282.

> comparison; as when a distant moonlit building attracts the eye, all the intervening space looks indistinct and shadowy because that has been rendered so conspicuous. Filled with inexpressible yearning, Phantasmion leaned forward to embrace the form of Zalia; but ah! no living mother watches over him now, and she who has done him this maternal service is but an impalpable phantom. 'Blessings on thee, my son!' whispered the spirit; 'restore my bones to their resting place, and lay those of my ancient guardian in the same grave!'[303]

Michael Wheeler notes that the idea of the grave as a place of rest evokes both a literal and metaphorical emphasis on peace.[304] As Archbishop Leighton remarked in an aphorism quoted in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1825), '[t]he Grave is thy bed of rest, and no longer the cold bed for thy Saviour has warmed it, and made it fragrant'.[305] While Queen Zalia's grave was disturbed by Glandreth's army, the re-interment of her bones to 'their resting place' suggests that she can now rest undisturbed. The implication here is that Phantasmion's mother is to be reburied with her guardian, Cyradis, in the 'green haunt' she used to visit in her early married years. Queen Zalia's reburial in the 'green haunt' thus embodies what Samantha Matthews has termed the 'anti-monumental pastoralism' of Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, insofar as it is an 'affective' rather than epitaphic memorial.[306] By this Matthews means the ways in which Wordsworth valued 'affective memorials' that emphasised the deceased's emotional connection to the living.[307] Queen

[303] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, pp. 298-299.
[304] Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 60.
[305] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence Morality and Religion: Illustrated by Extracts From Our Elder Divines Especially From Archbishop Leighton*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1836), p. 298.
[306] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 159.
[307] Ibid., p. 159.

Zalia's reburial maintains her affective connections to the burial ground and by extension her familial relationships, thus compensating for Glandreth's plan to destroy her legacy.

The next section considers the 'death' and return of Princess Iarine's mother, Anthemmina. Her return differs from Queen Zalia's insofar as she is presumed dead and briefly reunites with her daughter before dying of malnutrition. Applying the idea of the spectre, the next section will argue that Anthemmina occupies a liminal state between life and death.

2.1b. The 'Death' of Anthemmina

This section explores the role of Princess Iarine's mother Anthemmina, who is presumed dead until it is revealed that she had been imprisoned by Glandreth on the Lost Land. I will argue that Anthemmina's spatial isolation on the Lost Land reflects her spectrality, by which I mean that she occupies a liminal state between life and death. The aim of this section, then, is to highlight the different forms of maternal absence that emerge in Coleridge's novel.

The narrative function of maternal absence has been explored at length by various scholars. In *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (2002), Susan C. Greenfield explores why maternal absence proliferates in eighteenth-century fiction. She argues that maternal absence is a problem of representation insofar as authors are unable to depict the cultural ideal of maternal perfection.[308] Hence, the 'successful enactment' of motherhood was 'a near narrative impossibility'.[309] Mothers are troubled figures in *Phantasmion*. They are either absent or embody the stereotype of the wicked (step)mother. For example, Princess Iarine's stepmother, Queen Maudra, plots with the sea witch Seshelma to ensnare the affections of Glandreth,

[308] Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 18.
[309] Ibid.

although she is ultimately redeemed by the novel's end. More relevant for the purposes of this chapter, however, is how mothers oscillate between presence and absence, life and death. I will argue that Anthemmina embodies this liminality. The idea of the spectre is especially useful here as it sheds light on the significance of maternal absence.

The idea of the spectre is prominent in post-Freudian readings of the family unit, which casts maternal absence as the locus for psychosexual development. Influenced by this psychoanalytical methodology, Carolyn Dever's study of dead and absent mothers in Victorian fiction argues that '[t]he iconography of the maternal ideal achieves its cultural power through a poetics of abandonment and ambivalence'. In other words, child-focused narratives are often predicated on maternal absence.[310] While Dever's thesis sheds light on the function of maternal absence, my understanding of spectrality is influenced by Marilyn Francus' discussion of 'spectral motherhood' in eighteenth century fiction. Although Francus is primarily concerned with 'monstrous' maternity (i.e., neglectful mothers and wicked stepmothers), her analysis of spectral motherhood is especially relevant to this chapter as it points to the various functions of maternal absence:

> Maternal power can be acknowledged because it is limited by her status *as* a spectral mother; whether she is spectral because she is absent, incognito, or dead, the effects of her spectral motherhood are necessarily bound—by the mother's return, the revelation of her identity, or her unchangeable, past narrative […] [m]ost importantly, the spectral mother brings to the forefront the issue of haunting, which marks the ideological work of all of these narratives: whether it is mothers who are haunted by lost children or a preferred motherhood they cannot enact; children who are haunted by a

[310] Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. xi.

> maternal ideal that their mothers fail to embody; or a society that is haunted by an ever-desired, seemingly ever-receding maternal ideal that domestic ideology cannot bring into being.[311]

Coleridge's characterisation of Anthemmina subscribes to Francus' articulation of spectral motherhood insofar as she is an absent presence. Anthemmina appears in two chapters of the novel. Her absence has a profound impact on the plot, as she was the original possessor of the silver pitcher, a magical object given to Anthemmina by Feydeleen, the Spirit of the Flowers, to protect her affections for King Penselimer. The central characters vie for ownership of the silver pitcher, unaware that it ultimately does not have power over them. More relevant for the purposes of this section is how Anthemmina 'haunts' Princess Iarine and the narrative.

Francus' suggestion that narratives of spectral motherhood invariably lead 'to questions of maternal return' is also true of the liminal mothers in *Phantasmion*, who die only to return again.[312] The circumstance of Anthemmina's 'death' is unique as, though King Penselimer sees her body rise out of the water, this is a trick conjured by the sea witch Seshelma; Anthemmina is never found until Princess Iarine sails to the Lost Land. That the Lost Land is a coastal landscape exacerbates Anthemmina's spatial and physical liminality. As Jessica Roberson notes in her analysis of sea burials, 'A specific plot or grave, with a marker, may be returned to far more reliably than a set of coordinates on the surface of a continually shifting body of water'.[313] Unlike Phantasmion, Princess Iarine cannot return to the site of her mother's grave as she is believed to have been lost at sea. Other than King Penselimer's vision, there is no solid confirmation that Anthemmina had died. This denial of

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[311] Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, p. 171.
[312] Marilyn Francus, 'The Lady Vanishes: The Rise of the Spectral Mother', in *The Absent Mother in the Cultural Imagination: Missing, Presumed Dead*, ed. by Berit Åström (Cham: Springer, 2017), pp. 25-44 (p. 29).
[313] Jessica Roberson, 'Sea-Changed: Felicia Hemans and Burial at Sea in the Nineteenth-Century Imaginary', *Gothic Studies*, 19 (2), 2018, 30-44 (p. 31).

a burial site paradoxically facilitates Anthemmina's brief return in the narrative, when she is discovered by her daughter on the Lost Land.

Anthemmina's slow death has been overlooked by critics, who have often read Coleridge's interest in material transformation in relation to Phantasmion's insect body. However, I would argue that Anthemmina's death speaks to the themes of absence and presence analysed throughout this chapter. She is described as a living corpse:

> The maiden [Iarine] felt unable to speak, but, perusing her face with deep anxiety, felt assured that she beheld her mother. The outline of her form and features was grandly beautiful; but her cheeks were white as wax, her blue eyes spectrally bright, and her delicate arms and fingers wasted to the bone. There was something wild and ghastly in her countenance…She [Iarine] had found her mother, but alas! in what a state! Here was the goodly fabric, to outward view still perfect: all the wondrous materials were yet in being, but the springs within had failed, and the whole was a wreck.

Here again Coleridge describes the human body as a 'fabric', suggesting that Anthemmina's materiality is pliable. That her eyes are 'spectrally bright' offers further evidence of Anthemmina's liminality: while she still lives at this point in the narrative, she is slowly dying. This in turn reinforces Anthemmina's spectrality and foreshadows her real death, which takes place shortly after her reunion with Princess Iarine.

Like the Palace Garden, the Lost Land mirrors the slow decay of Anthemmina's body. The plants are described as 'sickly' and 'the sky wore a leaden hue even more melancholy than that of the plain'. There is also 'a collection of low mounds like graves'.[314] The 'black marble' that decorates the interior of Anthemmina's mansion suggests a period of mourning:

[314] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 319.

this is exemplified when Princess Iarine finds the corpse 'of an old man being laid out there, and branches of cypress mixed with yew arranged over the head of the corse'.[315] According to *The Language of Flowers* (1835), 'the yew is among all nations the emblem of sorrow', noting that its fruit looks 'like drops of blood'. The cypress tree 'excites melancholy ideas' as it derived its name from Cyparissus, a friend of Apollo's who changed into a cypress tree after praying to God that 'his mourning might be made perpetual' when he killed a stag.[316] Readers are therefore invited to think about the Lost Land as a space of death and loss. Anthemmina roams the 'dreary coast' fantasising about Phantasmion's father, whom she had wanted to marry; her elderly companion, Dorna, laments that the 'noxious vapours of this pool have turned her brain'.[317] Anthemmina's liminality is therefore exacerbated by the peripheral space of the coastline. The 'noxious vapours' also suggests that it is the environment itself which has caused the 'wreck' of Anthemmina's 'goodly fabric'.[318] When Feydeleen's nymphs arrive shortly after Anthemmina dies, they sing a 'farewell strain' that describes Anthemmina in terms of the coastline: her 'tortur'd bosom heav'd/Restless as waves that lash'd her sea-beat haunt'. The nymphs also encourage Anthemmina to 'fly with us, free, free, as ocean's gale/To roam at large, releas'd from sorrow's power'.[319] This indicates that while the Lost Land embodies Anthemmina's spatial isolation as she lives, when she dies, she is 'released' from the 'restless waves' and, by extension, her body.

Wheeler's taxonomy of the liminality of death is relevant here as it demonstrates how the dying process was conceived as a 'site of transition':

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[315] Ibid., p. 320.
[316] Louise Cortambert, *The Language of Flowers with Illustrative Poetry; To which are now first added The Calender of Flowers and the Dial of Flowers*, revised by Frederic Shoberl, 4th edn (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), p. 246; p. 210.
[317] Ibid., p 333; p. 322.
[318] Ibid., pp. 321-322.
[319] Ibid., pp. 336-338.

Fixed state	*Liminal phase*	*Fixed state*
Life	Recognition: death is anticipated → Dying process → Moment of death	→ Death

[320]

Coleridge depicts Anthemmina's death as a transitional process. When Phantasmion disembarks on the shore of the Lost Land, he discovers Princess Iarine 'kneeling beside her mother, who lay on the margin of the lake, and seemed nigh unto death'.[321] The physical attributes of putrefaction begin to appear on Anthemmina, such as the 'mists of death' which begin 'to darken her eyes'.[322] The cultural ideal of the 'good death', which I have outlined in section 1.1a of this chapter, sheds light on the circumstances of Anthemmina's passing. Jalland notes that the Evangelical ideal of the good death established that relatives should be present so that the dying person can say farewell and that the dying person should be lucid at the end to 'prove his or her worthiness for salvation'.[323] Though Anthemmina is a 'wreck' when Princess Iarine discovers her on the Lost Land, she achieves lucidity in her dying moments, for '[n]ow that life was waning, her senses fully returned'.[324] This in turn indicates not only the liminality of the dying process as Anthemmina moves from one state of being to the next, but also points to the intergenerational significance of the deathbed. By this I mean that death mediates the reunion between Princess Iarine and her absent mother.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has sought to uncover the significance of death and decay on Coleridge's ideas of the human body. Through a close analysis of Princess Iarine, Queen Zalia, and

[320] Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians*, p. 69.
[321] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 334.
[322] Ibid., p. 335.
[323] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 26.
[324] Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion*, p. 334.

Anthemmina, it has identified maternal absence and death as a major theme of *Phantasmion*. While Coleridge's interest in bodiliness has been noted by the likes of Ruwe and Barbeau, this chapter has aimed to extend critical interpretations of her *oeuvre* by drawing attention to the figure of the corpse in her body of work.

I have argued that the materiality of death allowed Coleridge to speculate about the transition from body to soul and the presence of the dead. Section 1.1a explored the cultural and theological implications of the human corpse in the nineteenth century, including a discussion of unpublished excerpts related to the deaths of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge in the 'Book of Mourning'. In so doing this chapter located a rhetoric of putrefaction in Coleridge's fiction and non-fiction. My textual analysis of Princess Iarine's dialogue about death and the loss of Phantasmion's mother was informed by the contexts of putrefaction outlined in section 1.1a. Coleridge's varied responses to the human corpse sheds light on the proto-abjection of dead bodies in *Phantasmion*: namely, the corpses of Queen Zalia and Phantasmion's friends, whose sudden deaths in the opening chapters introduce Phantasmion to the materiality of death.

My discussion of the brief returns of Queen Zalia and Anthemmina in sections 2.1a and 2.1b aimed to show that death is not the end; rather, the dead may be present in another stratum of existence. An analysis of the cultural contexts of burial—specifically Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs*—showed the ways in which burial mediated affective relationships. I applied this understanding to my reading of Queen Zalia's disinterment, which I argued threaten to destroy not only the dynastical inheritance of Palmland, but also Queen Zalia's memory. Phantasmion intercepts Glandreth's plan to destroy Queen Zalia's remains by rescuing her coffin, thus facilitating her return in spirit form.

Section 2.1b built upon this idea of return by considering Anthemmina as a spectral mother. The figure of the spectre is prominent in Gothic and psychoanalytical scholarship, which interrogates the issue of 'haunting'. While Anthemmina is not a ghost, she is poised at a liminal moment between life and death. She is described as a corpse-like figure and, when she finally passes away, her death is described as a 'release'. This in turn points to the different forms of absence that emerge in *Phantasmion*. Queen Zalia dies only to return later in the narrative to ask Phantasmion to rebury her, while Anthemmina's slow death facilitates an affective encounter with her daughter. The death and return of mothers in *Phantasmion* thus suggests that the dead remain with us. This reinforces my idea of the absent presence, for while dead mothers are physically absent, they are incorporeally present. The next chapter extends this notion of absent presences by exploring narratives of child abduction and return in Mary Shelley's *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. I argue that Shelley uses the rhetorical strategy of storytelling to facilitate an affective encounter between lost parents and their children. In this way *Proserpine* and *Maurice* enact a reversal of *Phantasmion* insofar as the children, rather than their parents, are absent.

Chapter 3: Storytelling and Child Absence in Mary Shelley's *Proserpine* (1820) and *Maurice; or, The Fisher's Cot* (1820)

In the previous chapter I argued that *Phantasmion* is a narrative of loss and return as dead mothers reappear in another form. This chapter applies the idea of loss and return to two of Mary Shelley's short stories for children, *Proserpine* and *Maurice* (both 1820). In August that year, Shelley recorded in her journal that she had written 'a story for Laurette', the eleven-year-old illegitimate daughter of her friends Margaret King, Lady Mountcashell, and George Tighe.[325] The story in question is *Maurice; or, The Fisher's Cot*, which was lost for over a hundred years until it was discovered in a box by the Tighes' Italian descendants in 1997. Although the Godwin-Shelley circle produced numerous books for and about children, gaps in the knowledge remain about the stories for Laurette and Shelley's contribution to children's literature overall. I aim to contribute to ongoing research on Shelley's children's literature by exploring how storytelling is used as a means of thinking about child absence and parental mourning in *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. In so doing this chapter continues to explore different forms of mourning. As I highlighted in the introductory chapter, Coleridge and Shelley wrote from the perspectives of both daughters and mothers. I read *Proserpine* and *Maurice* through the lens of parental loss.

This chapter argues that *Proserpine* and *Maurice* are about the recovery of children as well as the recovery of stories. While maternal absence is a recurrent theme in Mary Shelley's fiction—many of her protagonists are motherless—*Proserpine* and *Maurice* interrogate themes of child absence. Proserpine is abducted by Pluto while wandering on the plain of Enna, and a compromise is struck which allows her to return to earth six months of the year

[325] Mary Shelley, 10 August 1820, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, *I* , p. 328.

after she eats the pomegranate; Maurice is kidnapped as a baby by a childless woman but is finally reunited with his biological father at the end of the story. I modify the critical lens of Turner's *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection, 1820-1850* (2017), which explores 'the work of a late Romantic generation of 'children', both literal and literary' by reading Shelley as a parent.[326] In so doing this chapter recentres the significance of absence and recovery in the stories for Laurette and reveals the thematic and personal resonances of the lost child. It considers how storytelling is used as a rhetorical and affective tool that facilitates the restoration of a lost child: this provides new ways of thinking about the family unit in Shelley's fiction, which both challenges the nuclear family unit and reinforces the strength of blood ties over social ones. By considering the affective possibilities of storytelling, this chapter locates sympathy and communication as major themes in stories about lost children and family recovery. Despite being composed in the same period as *Proserpine* and *Maurice*, I have excluded *Midas* from my analysis as it does not address the themes of familial absence and recovery.

Storytelling was key to the formation of the Godwin-Shelley family's individual and group authorial identities. As William St. Clair remarks, 'the creation of a text was seldom a solitary activity' in the Romantic period.[327] The composition history of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), wherein the residents of the Villa Diodati were challenged to write a ghost story, is a famous example, and has since become ingrained in the Shelley mythology. However, storytelling informed Shelley's whole writing life. It mediated her personal relationships: for instance, her reading journal shows what she and Percy Bysshe Shelley read individually and together. Moreover, her personal connections to the Juvenile Library, William and Mary Jane Godwin's children's bookselling business, points to the

[326] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection, 1820-1850* (Cham: Springer, 2017), p. 1.
[327] William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 158.

existence of different audiences and registers of storytelling. That she had Laurette Tighe in mind when writing her children's stories implies that she was interested in how storytelling mediates intergenerational relationships. As such this chapter understands *Proserpine* and *Maurice* as intergenerational relics.

My argument is informed by Julie Carlson's study of 'England's first family of writers': Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and Mary Shelley. Carlson's exclusion of Mary Jane Godwin and Shelley's siblings from her analysis indicates an essentialist view of the family, wherein the definition of 'family' is limited to Shelley and her biological parents in a household that comprised of stepparents (Mary Jane), stepsiblings (Claire and Charles Clairmont), and half siblings (Fanny Imlay and William Godwin Jr.). Nevertheless, her exploration of how reading and writing mediated familial dynamics is particularly relevant to this chapter. I take forward her idea of the 'work of mourning', which stipulates that loss had personal and fictive resonance for Shelley and her parents.[328] By 1820 the Shelleys had lost nearly all their children: only their youngest, Percy Florence, survived infancy. Laurette's mother, Margaret King, had to relinquish custody of her seven legitimate children when she eloped with George Tighe. In a short autobiographical account addressed to Laurette and Nerina, her younger daughter, King writes that:

> the loss of my seven children was one of the most severest punishments of my misconduct, but the reflection that I could never have been of any service to them & the certainty that other people had more influence to obtain for them some degree of education, in a short time reconciled me to this separation: and the birth of Laurette in 1809 consoled me for the privation of others.[329]

[328] Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family*, p. 15.
[329] Margaret King, 'Holograph autobiographical account of Margaret King Moore, Lady Mount Cashell', April 1818. Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library (S'ANA 0763), p. 4.

This short extract touches upon one of the questions addressed in this chapter: what does it mean to be lost? Although the dead Shelley infants differ from King's legitimate children, all are separated from their parents. King notes that losing her children was 'one of the most severest punishments', although she explains that the births of Laurette and Nerina, and the good education that her other children would receive from family members, was a source of consolation. There is no such consolation in Shelley's correspondence following the deaths of her two children. Writing to Marianne Hunt in June 1819, she notes, 'May you my dear Marianne never know what it is to loose [*sic*] two only & lovely children in one year—to watch their dying moments—& then at last to be left childless & for ever miserable'.[330] Scholars have read Shelley's fictional lost children within the context of her dead infants. Reading *Proserpine* and *Maurice* in relation to the lives and writings of the women of the Godwin-Shelley circle—including Wollstonecraft, Fenwick, and King—Lissa Paul observes that 'the family histories of lost mothers, lost fathers, and lost children would have been entwined'.[331] Child absence therefore had both personal and thematic resonance for Shelley and her circle. The personal losses that Shelley sustained in the years preceding the composition of *Proserpine* and *Maurice* invite a reassessment of who is considered 'lost' and the different iterations of absence at play in her corpus. Unlike most of her adult fiction, *Proserpine* and *Maurice* offer the possibility of family reunion. This opens new lines of inquiry regarding the function of absence, loss, and recovery in children's fiction of the period.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. Section 1, 'The Contexts of Storytelling in the Godwin-Shelley family and circle', is divided into two subsections. Section 1.1a provides an overview of family storytelling and 'kinship', while section 1.1b

[330] Mary Shelley, 'To Marianne Hunt', 29 June 1819, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I,* p. 101.
[331] Lissa Paul, *The Children's Book Business: Lessons from the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 129.

explores children's storytelling. This section establishes how shared reading and writing practices among the Godwin-Shelley family and their circle informed their fictional representations of the family unit. I use 'family' to refer to the Godwins (Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Jane Godwin, and their children) and the Shelleys (Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley and their children), while 'circle' refers to the family and their friends (such as Margaret King and Eliza Fenwick), although there are overlaps between them. Section 2, 'Lost Children', is divided into two subsections. Section 2.1a, 'The Lost Child and Self-Discovery/(Re)discovery' explores the narrative significance of child abductees. Section 2.1b, 'Lost Daughters', looks at the thematic affinities between *Proserpine*, Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (1819), and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819), all of which introduce the theme of father/daughter and uncle/niece incest. Given that much of the criticism produced on *Proserpine* recognises and discusses its links with *Mathilda*, I have afforded it its own section here. I argue that the figure of the lost daughter in these texts allows the Shelleys to interrogate the affective possibilities—and limits—of storytelling. This leads on to the third section, 'Childlessness', which is split into two subsections. Section 3.1a, 'Parents Who Lose Children', analyses how Shelley uses the language and imagery of parental grief in her depiction of Ceres and the Traveller. Section 3.1b, 'Parents Who Want Children' focuses on the character of Dame Smithson—the only maternal figure in *Maurice* to be given a voice. Comparing her to Fenwick's Mrs Lawson in *Visits to the Juvenile Library* (1805), who abducts Mrs Clifford's daughter out of jealousy, I argue that the resolution of the story depends upon the resolution of blood family ties.

1. The Contexts of the Storytelling in the Godwin-Shelley Family and Circle

1.1a. Kinship and Family

The writings of the Godwin-Shelley circle are often read in the context of the family unit in which they were produced. This is because some of them were biologically related and lived in the same space, but also because their fiction is thematically similar. Belonging and abandonment, social isolation, and power imbalances are all defining themes of their works. These themes frequently coalesce on the family unit, as their fiction explores where and to whom an individual belongs. This allows them to both reinforce and challenge the strength of social and blood ties. Furthermore, like the Coleridge family, the Godwin-Shelleys participated in intergenerational editing, with Mary Shelley beginning a memoir of William Godwin in the 1830s and publishing a selection of Percy Bysshe Shelley's works until the 1840s . This signifies different types of storytelling—poetry, prose, biography—which in turn speaks to the importance of reading and writing for the Godwin-Shelley family. For the purposes of this section, I provide an overview of how storytelling and shared reading and writing practices mediated the personal and literary connections of the Godwin-Shelley family.

Laurel Kiser's idea of the 'shared frame', a term that describes how families communicate with each other emotionally, can be mapped onto the shared reading and writing practices of a literary family. Although Kiser's methodology is psychological rather than literary, it nevertheless points to the potentially affective encounters generated through storytelling:

> Stories that become incorporated in the family history and communicate important information about the family involve a *shared frame*. This shared frame provides a platform for families to understand each other's actions and emotions, jointly appraise situations and place events within the family's past, current, and future […] Arriving at this shared frame is not an easy process. It

> is a skill that families practice through the act of storytelling as they build and communicate their shared worldview.[332]

The writings of the Godwin-Shelley family consistently grapple with the ambiguities of familial dynamics. While some characters, like Proserpine, Maurice, and Ethel Lodore, search for or are searched by their parents, others, like Frankenstein's Creature and Mathilda, Godwin's Mandeville, and William Godwin's Jr.'s Ambrose, ultimately fail to find a sense of belonging to a bigger collective. Beatrice Turner's claim that William Godwin Jr. and Shelley interrogate 'what it means to 'belong' to a family, and how your family knows you belong to them' points to their shared interest in family loss and recovery, as well as the family as a performance.[333] Yet there is also another kind of performance at play in their works—the performance of storytelling. I argue throughout this chapter that storytelling is an intergenerational insofar as it facilitates a reunion between lost children and their grieving parents.

In recent decades there has been a growing interest in Romantic period literary networks, authorship, and collaboration. The Godwin-Shelley family are often used as a prime example due to their shared reading and writing practices. Anna Mercer's extensive study of Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley's literary partnership has shed light on their 'literary and intellectual openness, evidenced by their use of the same notebooks and their reading aloud to each other', activities which also frequently included Claire Clairmont.[334] While social and shared reading was extremely common in the Romantic period (as St. Clair demonstrates), the Shelleys' literary collaboration is particularly noteworthy because of their shared biographical circumstances. Mary Shelley's reading list records what she read

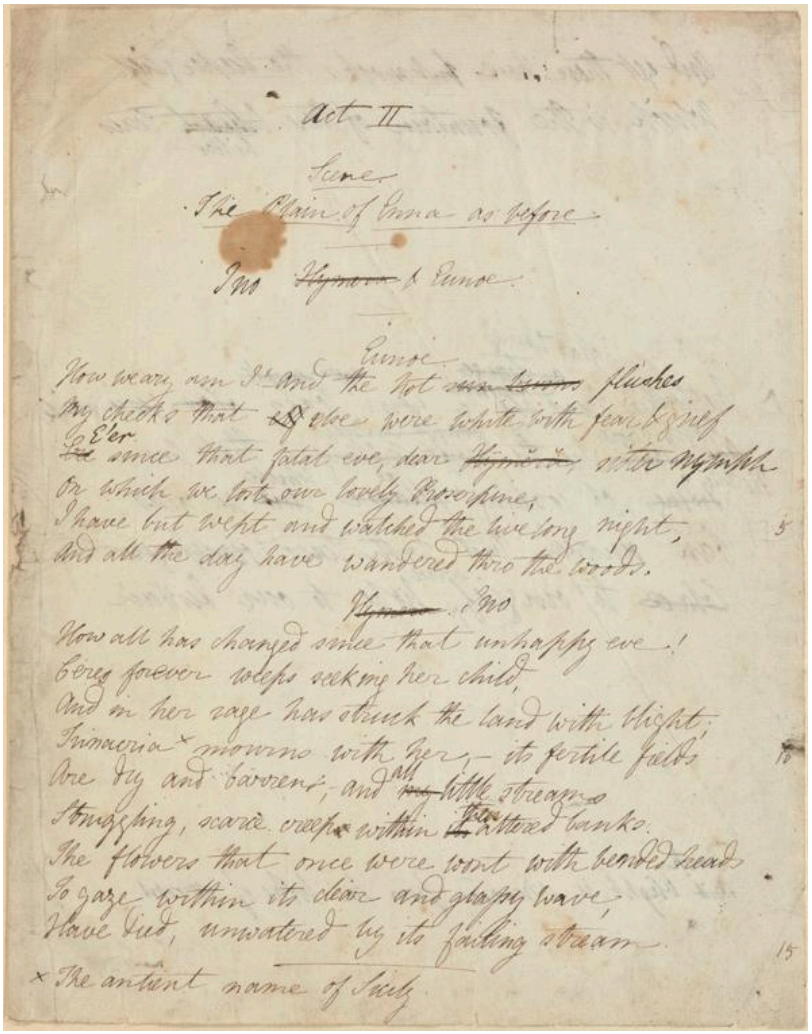
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[332] Laurel J. Kiser et al., 'Who Are We, But For the Stories We Tell: Family Stories and Healing', *Psychol Trauma*, 2.3 (2010), 1-13 (p. 4).
[333] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 165.
[334] Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 6.

individually and with Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1820, the year Shelley wrote the stories for Laurette, she read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a book she used as the basis for *Proserpine* and *Midas*) with Percy Bysshe Shelley. This is important for several reasons. Firstly, as Mercer points out, it is testament to their collaborative process: a draft of Act II of *Proserpine*, held at the Pforzheimer in New York, shows evidence of this, with Percy Bysshe Shelley editing 'Ere' to 'E'er', although Mary Shelley did not adopt this specific revision (see figure 6). Read alongside *Proserpine*'s Italian setting and references to the Prometheus myth, this indicates that the Shelleys discussed the composition of the drama.[335] Secondly, as Stephen M. Wheeler points out, the *Metamorphoses* 'is deeply concerned with the act of storytelling', and *Proserpine* is likewise concerned with the power of stories and who narrates them, as I explore in sections 2 and 3 of this chapter.[336] Shelley's learning of the Greek language with Percy Bysshe Shelley is relevant here. Jennifer Wallace describes the Shelleys' reading of the classics as evidence of their 'collaborative engagement' and 'intellectual embrace'.[337] This speaks to Scott Krawczyk's definition of a 'collaborative consciousness', which refers to the public and private realms of writing. In his study of Romantic era literary families, Krawczyk notes that shared reading had an 'erotic component' for the Shelleys as it mediated 'emotional, intellectual, and/or physical connection'.[338] While these 'collaboratively induced forms of connection' were certainly an important part of the Shelleys' literary and personal relationship, their interest in classical storytelling also included others, as is evidenced in Mary Shelley's gifting of *Proserpine* and *Midas* to Laurette Tighe.

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[335] Ibid., pp. 100-101.
[336] Stephen M. Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders: Audience and Performance in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 49.
[337] Jennifer Wallace, ''Copying Shelley's Letters': Mary Shelley and the Uncanny Erotics of Greek', *Women's Studies*, 40.4, (2011), 404-428 (p. 407).
[338] Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. xiv.


Act II

Scene

The Plain of Enna as before

Ino Hymen & Cupid

Cupid

How weary am I and the hot ~~sun burns~~ flushes
My cheeks that ~~Ceres~~ were white with fear & grief
Ever
~~Ere~~ since that fatal eve, dear ~~Hymen~~, when Nymph
Or which we lost our lovely Proserpine,
I have but wept and watched the live long night,
And all the day have wandered thro the woods.

~~Hymen~~ Ino

How all has changed since that unhappy eve!
Ceres forever weeps seeking her child,
And in her rage has struck the land with blight;
Trinacria* mourns with her, – its fertile fields
One dry and barren; and all ~~the~~ little streams
Struggling, scarce creep within ~~their~~ altered banks.
The flowers that once were wont with beaded head
To gaze within its clear and glassy wave,
Have died, unwatered by its failing stream.

* The antient name of Sicily

Figure 6: Holograph drama (fragment), Proserpine *(1820). Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library.*

The conceptualisation of the Romantic author as working not in isolation but in tandem with others has also led to an increased interest in family authorship and 'kinship'. Jane Spencer's definition of 'kinship' as a biological and figurative 'genealogy' indicates the nuances of the term.[339] In Spencer's formulation, kinship refers to both literary inheritance (i.e., Edmund Spenser as the 'father' of John Milton) and blood relations (i.e., Lucy Aikin's editing of Anna Laetitia Barbauld). This recalls Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' wherein a writer grapples with the reputation of those that came before them. However, I am primarily concerned with how the family works as a unit. Naomi Tadmor argues that by the eighteenth century the middle-class family included extended family members and

[339] Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

servants.[340] This is known as a household family. Building upon this, Michelle Levy has explored the Romantic literary family with reference to the Aikin-Barbaulds, the Wordsworths, the Coleridges, and the Godwin-Shelleys. She reads the Romantic literary family in the context of an emergent manuscript culture, arguing that family authorship was 'a distinctive and cultural formation of the Romantic period'.[341] Manuscript culture was a driving force of Early-Modern authorship, including 'script' poetry written by noble families, as well as diverse forms of writing—including commonplace books and miscellanies—a small number of which made it into print. Levy's tracing of how Romantic manuscript culture emerged out of these earlier authorial practices, as well as how different literary families negotiated their group and individual authorial identities in an era of mass print, indicates that the cultural formation of the Romantic family is interconnected with the history of books and literacy. This is a useful framework through which to read the Godwin-Shelley family and circle, whose writings consistently address the topic of the family and how reading and writing can mediate familial communities.

The literary family denotes not only shared reading and writing practices but also a shared living space. Sharon Joffe's articulation of a 'kinship coterie', by which she means the 'biologically related circumstances' of the women of the Godwin-Shelley family, is particularly relevant in this regard.[342] Her study of Mary Shelley, Fanny Imlay, and Claire Clairmont emphasises the significance of shared living spaces as well as familial ties:

> Godwin's daughters—themselves already members of a larger circle which included writers such as Percy Shelley, Byron, and Godwin—form their own private, gendered circle and band together because of familial and spatial ties. They use their writing as a way of extending and communicating shared

[340] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, p. 10.
[341] Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship*, p. 2.
[342] Sharon Joffe, *The Kinship Coterie*, p. 5.

> ideologies, notions, and concerns voiced within their inhabited intellectual milieu. The kinship coterie became an important forum for these women who sought an intellectual life, and—for Mary Shelley and Clairmont—who aspired to authorship.[343]

Joffe's formulation of kinship suggests a private circle of readers who, united by shared biographical circumstances, write and respond to one another. Julian North's discussion of Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs* (1809–1810), which argues that mourners are bound by sympathy and kinship, is useful here. North's remark that Wordsworth reinforces 'a consoling vision of a coterie readership and of biography as a private, affective exchange in the face of the reality of a marketplace where *Lives* [biographies]—and reputations—were increasingly being produced and consumed by strangers, in a spirit far from sympathetic' points to the affective limits of family storytelling.[344] However, in this chapter I consider how this potential lack of sympathy comes not from public readers but within the family or coterie itself. Shelley's *Mathilda* (1819) dramatizes the search for and resistance to a sympathetic audience, while the sharing of stories in *Maurice* facilitates an empathetic exchange and eventual reunion with the biological rather than social family; at the same time, shared suffering mediates social relationships in Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). While at times the family consists of social relations, this is simultaneously challenged by an essentialist emphasis on the biological family. In terms of the lost child story, which I explore in more detail in the next section of this chapter, such representational ambiguity begs the question of what type of family—and family story—is recovered in Shelley's fiction: although step, foster, and surrogate figures appear in her work, I suggest throughout this chapter that family recovery is made possibly only when biological parent and child are

[343] Ibid., p. 5.
[344] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 36.

reunited, in spite of the positive social bonds that both Proserpine and Maurice forge. This in turn points to how the family unit and familial loss can broaden scholarly approaches to the affective possibilities—and limits—of shared storytelling.

It is important to recognise that, as *Proserpine* and *Maurice* were written for an eleven-year-old girl, the child audience participates in this narrative of familial recovery. As Turner contends, the stories for Laurette are 'a memento of relationships which were both friendship and familial, social and sanguineal'.[345] That Shelley returns to themes of familial absence and recovery in her children's stories—themes which are predominant in her corpus overall—suggests that Laurette was encouraged to think about her place in the family and kinship coterie. The next section of this chapter draws upon the ideas of kinship and recovery addressed here by considering how the Godwin-Shelley circle adapted these themes of familial absence and familial storytelling for a child audience.

1.1b. Children's Storytelling

Storytelling is a key narratological device in children's and young adult fiction. As *Proserpine* and *Maurice* were written for a child, it is important to consider the contexts of storytelling in Romantic period children's literature. The Godwin-Shelley circle produced numerous books for younger audiences. From 1805 to 1825, William and Mary Jane Godwin ran the Juvenile Library, their children's bookselling business. This venturing into children's literature had some bearing on the stories for Laurette, as Shelley was unsuccessful in her attempt to publish *Maurice* with the Juvenile Library. This section situates *Proserpine* and *Maurice* within the context of the Godwin-Shelley circle's children's books, as well as considering the wider contexts of children's storytelling in the Romantic period.

[345] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 165.

Matthew Grenby's idea of the 'originary myth' of children's literature indicates that the family unit plays a key role in the composition and dissemination of books aimed at younger audiences. This myth is an account 'of how the book grew from a story told privately by a particular adult to particular children'.[346] *Proserpine*, *Midas*, and *Maurice* are prime examples of this originary myth as they were written for and gifted to Laurette 'from her friend Mrs Shelley'.[347] It is also an important part of the creation of the Juvenile Library. In *Bible Stories* (1802), which was published with Benjamin Tabart's Juvenile Library, Godwin explains that '[t]he following book is the production of a parent, who could not find, among the numerous works which for the last twenty years have been published for the use of children, one which he could with complete satisfaction put into the hands of his own'.[348] The Godwins aimed to use storytelling to facilitate children's social and intellectual progress, an ethos that is also apparent in Godwin's earlier philosophical works from the 1790s. The genre of books that Godwin wrote for the Juvenile Library—histories of Rome and Greece, English histories, biblical tales, and fables—shows that the firm was interested in the recovery and adaptation of stories for a new audience. The recovery of stories was not only part of the Juvenile Library's ethos but has also influenced its reception. As Suzanne Barnett and Katherine Gustafson note, several of the firm's publications now 'have limited circulation', although they had a relatively wide readership in the nineteenth century.[349] Even though Shelley attempted to publish *Maurice* with the Juvenile Library, Godwin rejected it on the grounds that 'it would not make more than a shilling book'.[350] The manuscript of *Maurice* was lost for over a hundred years until it was found in a box of family papers by Nerina's

[346] M.O. Grenby, 'The origins of children's literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by M.O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 3-18 (p. 14).
[347] This is the dedication written on the first page of *Maurice*. See Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 59.
[348] William Godwin, *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, *Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), p. 313.
[349] Suzanne L. Barnett and Katherine Bennett Gustafson, 'Introduction: The Radical Aesop: William Godwin and the Juvenile Library, 1805-1825', *Romantic Circles*, (2014), <https://romantic-circles.org/Editions/Publication/godwins-history-england>
[350] William Godwin, 'To Mary Shelley', 10 October 1821, qtd. in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings,* 3 vols, ed. by Pamela Clemit and A.A. Markley (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), p. xliii.

descendants in 1997, and it has received comparatively little scholarly attention since. This story of a work lost and found after over a century is doubly significant, as it shows that loss and recovery are not only themes of the Godwin-Shelley circle's fiction but also integrated in the textual fabric and circulation of the books themselves.

The Godwin-Shelley circle had a shared interest in the 'gradual, but transformative effect of storytelling on youthful auditors' which Katie Trumpener has identified as a key component of Romantic period children's literature.[351] She cites the *Arabian Nights*, a collection of tales featuring the storyteller Scheherazade, as an example. The first English–language edition aimed at children, *The Oriental Moralist or the Beauties of the Arabian Nights Entertainment*, was published in 1791.[352] Shelley read Denis Chavis' French translation, *Arabian Tales; or, a Continuation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1793) in 1815 and 1817. Rebecca Nesvet's linking between Scheherazade and Monina in *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830) points to Shelley's continued interest in frame stories.[353]

In Romantic period children's literature, frame stories are generally used to trace the emotional, social, and moral development of children. In Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) Mrs Mason uses a series of cautionary tales to instil moral principles in her young charges, which Old Daniel uses for the same purpose in King's *Stories of Old Daniel; or Tales of Wonder and Delight* (1808). The frontispiece to the *Stories of Old Daniel* (published with the Juvenile Library) presents Old Daniel as an Aesopic narrator stretching out his arm to draw in his young audience, an image that can also be seen on the frontispiece to William Godwin's *Fables of Ancient and Modern* (1805). Charles and Mary Lamb's *Mrs*

[351] Katie Trumpener, 'Tales for child readers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. by Katie Trumpener and Richard Maxwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 177-190 (p. 185).
[352] Ibid., p. 184.
[353] Rebecca Nesvet, ''Like the Sultaness Scheherazade': The Storyteller and the Reading Nation in *Perkin Warbeck*', in *Mary Shelley: Her Circle and Her Contemporaries*, ed. by L. Adam Mekler and Lucy Morrison (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 169-184 (pp. 169-170).

Leicester's School; or, The History of Several Young Ladies, Related by Themselves (1808), also published with the Juvenile Library, is a collection of life-stories featuring numerous scenes of reading; one of them centres on Elizabeth Villiers, who learns to read by tracing the letters on her mother's tombstone. Elizabeth recalls that 'in this manner, the epitaph on my mother's tomb being my primer and my spelling-book, I learned to read' (see figure 7).[354] Although Scheherazade and Monina tell stories to a wider audience, in the Godwin-Shelley circle's children's fiction, scenes of storytelling often coalesce around the family unit. Mrs Mason and Old Daniel are surrogate figures who use storytelling to instruct their young audience, while the little girl's reading of the tombstone in *Mrs Leicester's School* points to the affective communication between living and dead family members. Whether the child's parents are living but ill defined, like Mary's and Caroline's in the *Original Stories* or the village children's parents in *Old Daniel*, or are dead, like the girl's mother in *Mrs Leicester's School*, familial absence is the prerequisite for a child's budding self-reliance.

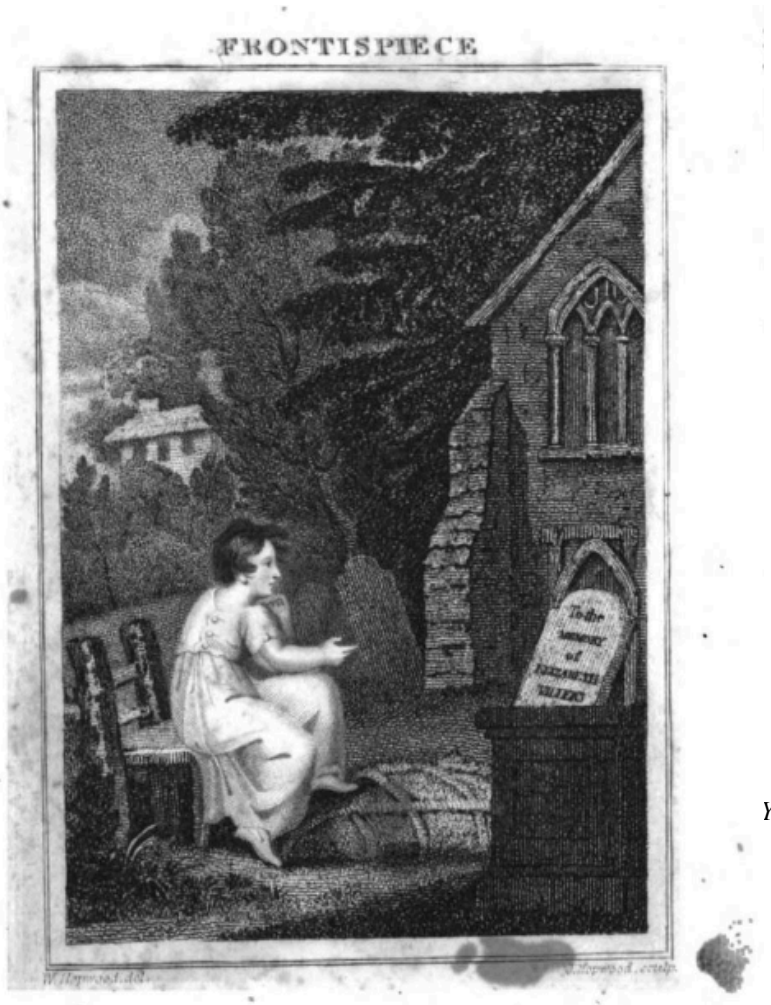


Figure 7: Frontispiece to the 1814 edition of Mrs Leicester's School (1805).

Young Ladies; Related by

Self-reliance and self-knowledge are stimulated by a child's engagement with the world around them. Empathy thus plays a key role in these narratives about lost children, for they gain knowledge not only about themselves but about others. As Trumpener states, children's realistic fiction 'can teach them not only about the larger world but about their own mental and emotional processes, helping them to learn or deepen their sense of empathy, and improve interactions with their own teachers, families, peers'.[355] This has additional poignancy in stories about infant abductees like Maurice, who learn of their true parentage. The sharing of stories in *Maurice* excites compassion in the listener. Maurice is conduced to 'open his whole heart' to the Traveller almost immediately after they have met, but while this points to an empathetic link between them, it also gestures towards an instinctive genetic response. Maurice, like his father, is 'good' and 'kind': while Dame Smithson and Old Barnet act as surrogate parents, they cannot compete with the Traveller's biological claim to Maurice. Though *Proserpine* does not deal with parental origins like *Maurice*, it too is interested in empathetic communication. News of Ceres' blight, where 'The springs decrease;—the fields whose delicate green/Was late her chief delight, now please alone/Because they, withered, seem to share her grief' elicits a solemn response from Arethusa: 'Unhappy Goddess! how I pity thee!'[356] It is Arethusa's desire 'To ease her anxious

[355] Katie Trumpener, 'Tales for child readers', p. 181.

[356] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 28.

heart' that compels her to share her knowledge of Proserpine's disappearance and, ultimately, facilitate their reunion.[357] Empathetic interaction in this case serves to mediate a parent's knowledge of their child's whereabouts, rather than a child's knowledge of their parentage.

Heather Bozant Witcher's reading of *Frankenstein* as an 'embedded act of narration…framed as one individual asking to enter into another sympathetic confidence, so that the sections—both separately and together—replicate the process of sympathetic collaboration' in the Shelleys' early years together is particularly relevant to this chapter.[358] Claire Tomalin reads the 'several different voices' in *Maurice* within the context of *Frankenstein*'s metanarrative.[359] However, while Tomalin's claim that *Maurice* 'is divided into three parts, just like a three–volume adult novel of its time' has been widely accepted, I would argue that its tripartite structure reflects three overlapping perspectives: the local in the tavern, the Traveller, and Maurice.[360] This reflects the frequency of frame stories in Romantic period children's literature; propels the narrative forward; and drives the search for and eventual reunion with a lost child. Collected and fitted together piece by piece, the conversations between each character lead to the discovery that Maurice and the Traveller are biological father and son, an idea I take forward in section 3.1a of this chapter. Read within this context, the frame stories of *Maurice* and *Proserpine*—where stories are shared and reported by other characters—not only build upon *Frankenstein*'s metanarrative but also the narrative tradition of Romantic period children's books. Laurette follows the lost child's journey, and like them, learns of their parentage (Maurice) and the circumstances of their disappearance (Proserpine).

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[357] Ibid.
[358] Heather Bozant Witcher, *Collaborative Writing in the Long Nineteenth Century: Sympathetic Partnerships and Artistic Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 60.
[359] Claire Tomalin, 'Introduction', in *Maurice, or The Fisher's Cot* by Mary Shelley, ed. by Claire Tomalin (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 1-54 (p. 9).
[360] Ibid.

Shelley's interest in writing for children may have been piqued by King, who was working on the sequel to the *Stories of Old Daniel* when she met the Shelleys and Claire Clairmont in Pisa in 1820. The relationship between the Godwin-Shelleys and the King-Tighes spanned several generations. From 1787 to 1788, King and her sister Mary had been taught by Wollstonecraft, who had travelled to Ireland to work as a governess; she used her experience with the King girls as the basis for the *Original Stories from Real Life*.[361] In her autobiographical account King writes that Wollstonecraft's 'mind appeared more noble & her understanding more cultivated than any others I had known'.[362] That King and George Tighe lived and published under the name 'Mr and Mrs Mason' in tribute to Wollstonecraft's fictional governess is testament to her lasting influence. Anne Markey has shown how a language of 'practical benevolence' unites the *Original Stories from Real Life*, *Stories of Old Daniel*, and *Maurice*, where children are depicted as and encouraged to be truthful and compassionate to others.[363] There are certainly thematic affinities between the *Stories of Old Daniel* and *Maurice*. The name 'Old Barnet' in *Maurice* could be a reference to Old Daniel. Every Sunday evening the village boys visit Old Daniel to 'partake of his fruit', while Old Barnet takes comfort in the prospect that Maurice 'may be able to read the Bible to me as my dame used'.[364] Old Daniel tells the village boys about 'The Boy Who was Forgot at School', in which a child is unwittingly separated from his parents after the army is garrisoned in their village. As his father is the governor, the schoolboy is advised by a woman to lie about his parentage in case it brings trouble, but he refuses on the grounds that 'God took care of those who spoke the truth'; he is safely returned to his parents after confirming his identity to an officer.[365] Maurice is likewise truthful and compassionate, 'always merry, always at work,

[361] Lissa Paul, *The Children's Book Business*, pp. 125-128.
[362] Margaret King, 'Holograph autobiographical account', p. 2.
[363] Anne Markey, 'The English governess, her wild Irish pupil, and her wandering daughter: Migration and maternal absence in Georgian children's fiction', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 25 (2010), 161-176 (p. 167).
[364] Margaret King, *Stories of Old Daniel; or Tales of Wonder and Delight. Containing Narratives of Foreign Countries and Manners, and Designed as an Introduction to the Study of Voyages, Travels, and History in General*, 3rd edn (London: M.J. Godwin & Co., 1813 [1808]), p. 6; *Maurice*, p. 66.
[365] Margaret King, *Stories of Old Daniel*, p. 161.

always ready to do a good turn for the poor as well as the rich'.[366] That the schoolboy is the child of a governor and Maurice's father 'the son of a professor of mathematics at the University of Oxford' points to the significance of class in these texts, an idea I take forward in my analysis of Dame Smithson in section 3.1b of this chapter.[367] The cautionary tales which thread the narrative structure of the *Original Stories from Real Life* and *Stories of Old Daniel* facilitate a child's growing moral, social, and emotional awareness, while the sharing of stories in *Maurice* results in a happy reunion between father and son. Shelley's children's stories not only thematically align with those produced by Wollstonecraft and King but, like them, she uses storytelling to facilitate affective intergenerational encounters.

2. Lost Children

2.1a. The Lost Child

The 'lost child' can refer to several different types of children. In Wordsworth's poetry, the lost child can denote an adult's irrecoverable past; on the other hand, the dead children in 'We Are Seven' (1798) 'The Thorn' (1798), 'The Female Vagrant' (1798), and the Lucy Gray poems (1799) suggest another kind of loss. This section considers how fictional lost children are symbolic of the (re)discovery of parental origins. For the purposes of this chapter, the 'lost child' refers to those who are abducted.

The lost child is a familiar literary trope. It is a recurring figure in fairy tales, which features a plethora of children that are lost, kidnapped, mistreated, and murdered by adults. It is also a prevalent figure in the *Bildungsroman* or 'novel of development', where the orphan-protagonist proliferates.[368] The *Bildungsroman*'s focus on the physical, moral, and emotional development of the protagonist indicates that the lost child is central to narratives

[366] Mary Shelley, *Maurice,* p. 66.
[367] Ibid., p. 77.
[368] Julia Prewitt Brown, 'The Moral Scope of the English *Bildungsroman*', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 663-678 (p. 665).

about origins, identity, and self-discovery. Proserpine's age changes across time: as Andrew Radford notes, 'she is depicted variously, some images presenting her as a young woman, others as a vulnerable and naïve child', although 'it is usually believed that Demeter's daughter was at least an adolescent at the time of her abduction'.[369] While the age of Shelley's Proserpine is never revealed, she is depicted as a vulnerable girl. Maurice is 'a boy of about thirteen years of age', signifying that he is an adolescent.[370] This aligns approximately with Laurette's age, who was eleven years old at the time. Reading from the perspective of the lost child, Laurette follows their wandering steps and the possible threats they encounter, although the inclusion of the grieving parent's perspective (Ceres and the Traveller) adds another layer to the stories, as I discuss in section 3 of this chapter.

Holly Blackford argues that adaptations of the Proserpine myth are evocative of a 'girls' gothic' that is 'expressive of the dangers and inevitability of impending womanhood for the daughter and impending mourning for the mother who knows that loss of Persephone renews civilization but who also feels her own renewal dependent on Persephone's presence'.[371] In this context the Proserpine myth symbolises a transitional period. Proserpine retellings can differ markedly depending on which characters are included and excluded. Barry Cornwall's *The Rape of Proserpine* (1820) excises Ceres from the text, while Pluto is depicted as a Byronic figure who seduces Proserpine with his 'terribly lovely' charisma. The monodrama ends with Cyane dissolving into tears as she fails to save Proserpine, who joins Pluto in the underworld after they share a kiss.[372] By contrast, Aubrey de Vere's masque *The Search After Proserpine* (1843) excludes Proserpine from its *dramatis personae*: instead, her words are echoed by the nymphs and her fate told to the audience by Iris (I discuss De Vere's

[369] Andrew Radford, *The Lost Girls: Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850-1930* (New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 24.
[370] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 60.
[371] Holly Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone in Girls' Fantasy Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 9.
[372] Barry Cornwall, *Marcian Colonna, an Italian Tale: With Three Dramatic Scenes and Other Poems* (London: John Warren and C & J Ollier: 1820), p. 151.

Search in section 3.1a of this chapter). This points to the intersecting perspectives of the Proserpine myth: on the one hand, it is a story of a wandering girl; on the other, it is a story of maternal grief. Shelley's version shares elements of both. During Act I the audience follows Proserpine until she disappears, while Act II follows Ceres and the nymphs on their search. Carlson reads Shelley's *Proserpine* as a critique of motherhood, arguing that 'Proserpine finds in Hades something that the maternal realm seeks to rein in: the pleasures of wandering, more places to stray'.[373] This reading presents Ceres as an overprotective mother who 'impedes' her daughter's wandering.[374] Although I agree that separation and togetherness is a major theme, I am not convinced that Proserpine enjoys the underworld. Rather, I would argue that Shelley depicts not the pleasures but the dangers of wandering.

The theme of absence is introduced immediately in the drama's opening lines. Act I begins *in medias res* with Proserpine entreating Ceres to stay with her rather than attend Jove's feast: 'Dear Mother, leave me not! I love to rest/Under the shadow of that hanging cave/And listen to your tales'.[375] Ceres also unwittingly foreshadows the abduction when she warns her daughter and the nymphs to 'Depart not from each other…by feint or force/You might be lost, and I might never know/Thy hapless fate'.[376] The numerous references to ancient mythology in the drama point not only to the Shelleys' classical reading as Mercer suggests, but also that, while Proserpine enjoys stories of Titans and nymphs when she lives on earth, after she disappears she becomes a story of abduction herself.[377] Rape and abduction stories occur in the *Metamorphoses* 'with such predictable regularity' as to become cliché.[378] 'The Song of Arethusa', composed by Percy Bysshe Shelley and sung by Ino in the middle of

[373] Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family*, p. 180.
[374] Ibid., p. 181.
[375] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 5.
[376] Ibid., p. 7.
[377] Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship*, p. 101.
[378] Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 32.

Act I, sets up Proserpine's abduction. Arethusa is wandering through the forest alone when she is suddenly pursued by Alpheus:

> Then Alpheus bold,
>
> On his glacier cold,
>
> With his trident the mountains strook;
>
> And opened a chasm
>
> In the rocks;—with the spasm
>
> All Erymanthus shook.[379]

The description of Alpheus anticipates the moment of Proserpine's abduction, which is told to Ceres—and the audience—by Arethusa. She recalls hearing Proserpine cry 'My Mother!' and 'Oh, Arethuse!', whereupon she sees 'the green earth closed above'.[380] In the text Proserpine does not actively seek to leave her mother and the nymphs as Carlson suggests but is in fact merely lost: 'My nymphs have left me, neglecting the commands/Of my dear Mother. Where can they have strayed?/Her caution makes me fear to be alone;—'.[381] Furthermore, when Proserpine is reunited with Ceres in the denouement, she is glad to have 'escaped from hateful Tartarus'.[382] While there are elements of self-discovery in *Proserpine*—for Proserpine becomes Pluto's queen after eating the pomegranate—Shelley is also keen to emphasise the grief that follows in the wake of wandering.

The wandering child is also a central figure in *Maurice*, although it is more concerned with the (re)discovery of parental origins. Maurice is neither an orphan nor foundling, but his story shares several elements with these narratives. As Cheryl Nixon states, the fictional

[379] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 11.
[380] Ibid., p. 31.
[381] Ibid., pp. 18-19.
[382] Ibid., *Proserpine*, p. 35.

orphan 'must often unravel mysteries concerning the family of origin, including his or her name, parentage, sibling relations and extended family; the solving of mysteries of blood marks the achievement of self-knowledge and self-reliance'.[383] Infant and toddler abductees like Maurice are distinct from the orphan and the foundling because they have no knowledge of their abductee status: Maurice believes that Dame and Daddy Smithson are his biological parents until the Traveller relates his story, whereupon Maurice cries, 'I am your son!...I am your lost boy!'[384] Nevertheless, this scene of recognition aligns it with orphan and foundling narratives. Moreover, Nixon's contention that fictional orphans 'value the self by plotting the self'—by which she means how orphans find their sense of worth and belonging through the act of narration—is a useful way to think about abductee narratives, in which storytelling leads to revelations about familial origins.[385] Eliza Fenwick's *Visits to the Juvenile Library* (1805) contains a subplot about Mrs Clifford's long-lost daughter, who was kidnapped as a baby. Mr Benson, the bookkeeper, relates Mrs Clifford's story to the Mortimers; her biological daughter, Ellen, visits the library to sell paintings to financially aid her 'mother'; when Ellen returns later in the narrative and asks Mrs Clifford and Arthur Mortimer to help her dying mother, the truth about Ellen's parentage is revealed. A later example is 'The Executioner' (1832), a short story written by Shelley's brother William Godwin Jr. Although 'The Executioner' works in a different genre and tone to *Maurice* and *Visits to the Juvenile Library*—both of which were written for children—and was published over a decade later, it too uses storytelling to interrogate themes of familial origins and child abduction. 'The Executioner' is written as a memoir or confession from the perspective of Ambrose, who is abducted as a baby by his father's nemesis, Lockwood. When Ambrose grows up, Lockwood tricks him into hanging his biological father and brother, and the story ends with him incarcerated as a lunatic as he protests his sanity. While the first-person confessional mode of

[383] Cheryl L. Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature* (New York: Ashgate, 2011), p. 18.
[384] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 84.
[385] Cheryl L. Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature*, p. 18.

Ambrose's story differentiates it from the tripartite structure of *Maurice* and the episodic structure of *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, it allows him to draw a distinction between his 'innate propensity' for goodness and the crimes he committed on the orders of Lockwood as he recollects 'the history of my transgressions'.[386] This is different from Shelley's treatment of Maurice, who remains 'a good boy, honest, handy and clever' despite the abuse he suffers at the hands of Daddy Smithson.[387] Notwithstanding differences in genre, tone, and audience, Shelley, Fenwick, and Godwin Jr. all use storytelling to reinforce the strength of the biological family over the surrogate one, an idea I take forward in sections 3.1a and 3.1b of this chapter.

Despite the contrasts between Proserpine's and Maurice's abductions—Proserpine is abducted and raped offstage, while Maurice discovers that he belongs to another family—both point to the affective possibilities and limits of shared storytelling. The story of Proserpine indicates that while storytelling can mediate affective intergenerational relationships, it can also produce loss—as is suggested by the similarities between Arethusa's abduction and Proserpine's own. *Maurice*'s privileging of the blood family implies that storytelling facilitates a child's sense of belonging, insofar as the Traveller's story leads to the discovery that Maurice is his son. The next subsection builds upon these ideas of affective storytelling by returning to *Proserpine*, which I compare to Shelley's *Mathilda* (1819) and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819).

2.1b. Lost Daughters

1818–1820 was a productive period for the Shelleys. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) and *The Cenci* (1819) while Mary Shelley wrote *Mathilda* (1819) and the

[386] William Godwin Jr., 'The Executioner', in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *vol. XXXI* (London and Edinburgh: 1832), p. 487; p. 306.
[387] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 66.

stories for Laurette. Mercer's observation that the Shelleys had a conversation 'on and off the page' indicates that these works were written in consultation.[388] Beatrice Cenci, Mathilda, and Proserpine are lost in a double sense: they are not only spatially lost (in the case of abductees, foundlings, and orphans) but are sexually lost when implicated in an incestuous relationship. Beatrice Cenci is raped by her father, Count Cenci; Mathilda's father declares his love for her before committing suicide; and although Pluto never appears on stage, the rape is implied in its intertextual proximity to Ovid and the Shelleys' other incest-adjacent texts. This section considers *The Cenci*, *Mathilda*, and *Proserpine* as part of an incest triptych about lost daughters.

There are various similarities between *The Cenci*, *Mathilda*, and *Proserpine* that are worth noting. Beatrice Cenci, Mathilda, and Proserpine are all described as lost. Lucretia refers to Beatrice as 'my lost child', Mathilda (along with her father) is 'lost for ever', and Ceres 'fear[s] my child is lost'.[389] Mathilda likens herself to 'Proserpine who was gaily and heedlessly gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery!'[390] This suggests that Mathilda's father, who declares his incestuous love for her, is Pluto. However, while Mathilda wishes that her 'lost parent…be restored to me', in *Proserpine* it is the parent that searches for their lost child.[391] This shows that the Proserpine myth could be used to interrogate different forms of absence. While Beatrice Cenci does not compare herself directly to Proserpine, her fear that Count Cenci 'should come/And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix/His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down down!' anticipates Arethusa's recollection that she saw Pluto strike 'furiously the green earth with his spear/Which yawned,—and down the deep Tartarian gulph/His black

[388] Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship*, p. 101.
[389] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jack Donovan and Cian Duffy (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 306 (ln. 104); Mary Shelley, *Mathilda*, ed. by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview, 2017), p. 64; Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 24.
[390] Mary Shelley, *Mathilda*, p. 58.
[391] Ibid., p. 109.

car rolled—the green earth closed above'.[392] As such the Shelleys had a clear interest in lost daughters and the power dynamics of incestuous violence. Crucially, the rapes occur offstage in between acts (*The Cenci* and *Proserpine*) and chapters (*Mathilda*). This points to the potential limits of storytelling insofar as certain events are withheld from the audience.

All three texts concerned with the act of narration and what happens offstage. While *Mathilda* is not a drama like *The Cenci* and *Proserpine*, several scholars have noted that Mathilda's self-fashioning as a Proserpine figure indicates a degree of theatricality.[393] Mathilda is troubled by when she should tell her story, how much of it she should tell, and to whom. It is imagined as a posthumous confession wherein Mathilda 'unveils the mystery' of her life after death. Claire Raymond notes that Mathilda 'elegizes herself' by recalling, and at times choosing to remain silent on, 'her act of sin'.[394] By this she means that Mathilda mourns herself: her identification with Proserpine further intimates that she is hastening towards death. She finds a sympathetic audience in the poet Woodville, who encourages Mathilda to share her story in what Joel Faflak has described as 'the cure of sympathetic exchange'.[395] Woodville in turn relates the death of his beloved to Mathilda, although his need for reciprocal communication contrasts with Mathilda's initial hesitance to relate her story to him. According to Christa Schönfelder, Mathilda's self-fashioning as a Proserpine figure signifies that storytelling is associated with death.[396] This is given a slightly different treatment in *Proserpine*, where storytelling facilitates the recovery of a lost child but is the

[392] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 31.
[393] Judith Pascoe, '*Proserpine* and *Midas*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 180-190 (p. 189).
[394] Mary Shelley, *Mathilda*, p. 41; Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 71.
[395] Joel Faflak, 'The inoperative community of Romantic psychiatry', in *Transforming Tragedy, Identity, and Community*, ed. by Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Tilottama Rajan, and Diego Saglia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 155-165 (p. 161).
[396] Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), p. 189.

instigator of that loss. After Beatrice Cenci is raped by her father, she too remains silent because there are 'sufferings which have no tongue':[397]

> What are the words which you would have me speak?
>
> I, who can feign no image in my mind
>
> Of that which has transformed me. I, whose thought
>
> Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up
>
> In its own formless horror. Of all words,
>
> That minister to mortal intercourse,
>
> Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to tell
>
> My misery: if another ever knew
>
> Aught like to it, she died as I will die,
>
> And left it, as I must, without a name.[398]

Just as Beatrice Cenci's rape happens offstage, so too does Proserpine's abduction. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that it was written for a child. After Proserpine loses Ino and Eunoe she walks in the direction of Arethusa's spring because 'She loves me well and oft desires my stay,—/The lilies shall adorn my mother's crown'. The '(exit)' that follows signals the moment of her disappearance and abduction.[399] Indeed, Pluto never appears on stage. This once again differentiates Shelley from some of her contemporaries, such as Cornwall, whose retelling imagines an erotic tryst between Pluto and Proserpine. By contrast, Shelley's Pluto is made present by his absence in the text: his name is mentioned only four times. This

[397] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*, p. 307 (ln. 142).
[398] Ibid., p. 306 (lns. 107-116).
[399] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 19.

signifies the unstageability of the abduction and suggests that Shelley's primary interest lay in mother-daughter relationships and the search for a lost child.

Proserpine's intertextual and compositional proximity to *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* shows that the Shelleys were interested in lost daughters. In all three texts, moments of silence and unnarratability stand in for incestuous male violence. However, *Proserpine* departs from the Shelleys' other incest-adjacent texts insofar as parent and child are reunited, although Proserpine's compulsory residence in 'saddest Tartarus' implies that the lost child cannot be wholly recovered by her mother.[400] The next section moves away from the child's perspective by considering how storytelling drives the search for and eventual reunion with a lost child.

3. Childlessness

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, parents are frequently absent in Shelley's fiction. Victor Frankenstein's parents die early in the narrative; Elizabeth Raby is an orphan in *Falkner* (1837); Lionel Verney's father dies in the first few chapters of *The Last Man* (1826) before he too loses his entire family; and after her father is killed in a duel, Ethel Lodore goes in search of her long-lost mother. Parental absence therefore takes different forms in Shelley's fiction, but although *Proserpine* and *Maurice* touch upon these themes—Ceres leaves for Jove's feast in the first act while Maurice's biological mother is a residual presence—Shelley provides the counterfigure of the childless parent. This section considers the Traveller, Ceres, and Dame Smithson as different iterations of the childless parent. To reflect this variety, I have divided this section into two parts: 'Parents Who Lose Children' focuses on Ceres and the Traveller, while 'Parents Who Want Children' analyses the character of Dame Smithson. In so doing it seeks to highlight the ways in which Shelley uses childlessness to interrogate different forms of familial absence.

[400] Ibid., p. 42.

3.1a. Parents Who Lose Children

This subsection reads the searching parent (Ceres and the Traveller) in relation to childlessness. The searching parent, like the lost child, is symbolic of familial absence and recovery. Although Laurette follows Maurice's rediscovery of his parental origins and Proserpine's abduction to the underworld, she also follows their parents' search for them. This subsection analyses how Shelley uses the language and imagery of mourning in her representations of the searching parent. In so doing it seeks to highlight Shelley's interest in parental loss and grief.

The theme of childlessness was particularly resonant for Shelley, who had lost three children by the time she had written *Proserpine* and *Maurice*. Writing in her journal a week after her first child's death, Shelley notes that she 'stay[s] at home net [sew] and think of my little dead baby—this is foolish I suppose yet whenever I am alone to my own thoughts & do not read to divert them they always come back to the same point—that I was a mother and am so no longer'.[401] She believed that the death of her baby stripped her of her maternal identity. Percy Bysshe Shelley read voraciously during this early period of mourning, as did Shelley herself, although she admitted privately that she thought 'of the little thing all day'.[402] In the stories for Laurette, Shelley suggests that a reunion between a lost child and their grieving parent is possible through the act of storytelling.

The Proserpine myth is 'traditionally viewed as the emblematic representation of maternal grief in Western culture'.[403] In Shelley's version, as in Ovid, Ceres blights the landscape in consequence of Proserpine's abduction. At the beginning of Act II, Ino tells the audience that 'Trinacria mourns with her;—its fertile fields/Are dry and barren'; in the final

[401] Mary Shelley, 13 March 1815, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, I*, p. 69.
[402] Ibid., 19 March 1815, p. 70.
[403] Mairéad McAuley, *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 142.

scene, Ceres warns that 'the Earth shall lose/Its proud fertility, and Erebus/Shall bear my gifts throughout th' unchanging year'.[404] While this points to the strength of maternal grief, it also conforms to the Ovidian depiction of Ceres as an embodiment of 'global infanticide', where maternity is associated not with life, but death.[405] Ceres' lament about 'the dreadful change your [Proserpine's] absence operates' suggests that the earth's equilibrium depends upon the spatial proximity between mothers and daughters.[406] That she is 'emphatically present throughout much of the action' shows that Shelley is interested not only in lost children but also the parents that lose them.[407] This is further reinforced when Ceres pleads, 'Leave me not[,] Proserpine[,]/Cling to thy Mother's side! He shall not dare/Divide the sucker from the parent stem', a reworking of Proserpine's entreaty that Ceres 'leave me not!' in the drama's opening lines.[408] Although Margot K. Louis suggests that Romantic writers reimagined the myth in a 'disconnected' way, Shelley's version evidences the 'sharp sensibility to pain' that Louis identifies with later Victorian adaptations.[409] Although Proserpine is not strictly a dead child, her dual residence in the underworld and on earth points to the liminal status between life and death that she now occupies.

De Vere's *The Search After Proserpine* is to my knowledge the closest thematically to Shelley's drama insofar as it focuses on the search and recovery of Ceres' lost daughter. Building upon the Ovidian and Homeric idea that Proserpine's residence in the underworld is an allegory for the change from Spring to Winter, De Vere uses the myth to explore 'the peculiar melancholy of the season' as well as its 'moral application…spiritual as well as

[404] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 26; p. 38.
[405] Mairéad McAuley, *Reproducing Rome*, p. 149.
[406] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 44.
[407] Suzanne L. Barnett, *Romantic Paganism: The Politics of Ecstasy in the Shelley Circle* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2017), p. 150.
[408] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 40.
[409] Margot K. Louis, *Persephone Rises, 1860-1927: Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p. 24.

philosophical'.[410] Like Shelley, De Vere uses storytelling to explore themes of child loss. De Vere's *Search* is the mirror-image of Shelley's retelling in that Proserpine never appears on stage: instead, her words are echoed by other characters. After asking the wood nymphs and fauns what they know about Proserpine's disappearance, Ceres hears the fountain nymphs sing, 'O mother, I was playing/Mid the soft Sicilian air/Forever must I languish/In this empire of Despair!': the nymphs' song leads to the discovery that Proserpine had been abducted by Pluto.[411] Similarly in Shelley's *Proserpine*, the abduction is reported through hearsay:

> *Areth*. My words are better than my freshest waves[:]
>
> I saw your Proserpine—
>
> *Cer*. Arethusa, where?
>
> Tell me! my heart beats quick, & hope and fear
>
> Cause my weak limbs to fail me.—
>
> *Areth*. Sit, Goddess,
>
> Upon this mossy bank, beneath the shade
>
> Of this tall rock, and I will tell my tale.
>
> The day you lost your child, I left my source.
>
> With my Alpheus I had wandered down
>
> The sloping shore into the sunbright sea;
>
> And at the coast we paused, watching the waves
>
> Of our mixed waters dance into the main:—

[410] Aubrey De Vere, *The Search After Proserpine, Recollections of Greece, and Other Poems* (London: J.H. Parker, 1843), pp. v-vi.
[411] Ibid., p. 24.

When suddenly I heard the thundering tread

Of iron hoofed steeds trampling the ground,

And a faint shriek that made my blood run cold.

I saw the King of Hell in his black car,

And in his arms he bore your fairest child,

Fair as the moon encircled by night,—[412]

As Katharina Volk points out, the *Metamorphoses* 'is not just about stories, but about storytelling, exhibiting nearly as much of an interest in the act of narrating as in the narratives themselves'. [413] *Proserpine* is likewise interested in the power of stories and who narrates them. Shelley's adaptation of Ovid's inset narrative structure, where various narrators report and retell stories to the audience, is not only an intertextual reference; rather, it is integral to the search and recovery of a lost daughter. Indeed, the only time Ceres is absent is when Proserpine is abducted. As such she must rely on others to provide information about her daughter.

Schönfelder's discussion of *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, a text also concerned with parental loss, highlights the significance of communication and community in stories about grieving parents. This contrasts with her analysis of *Mathilda*, which posits that storytelling is associated with death and loss as opposed to recovery. Maria's act of writing the memoir arises out of the potential murder of her child, while her suffering mediates her friendships with Jemima and Henry Darnford. This in turn points to the affective possibilities of storytelling, as Schönfelder claims:

[412] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 30.
[413] Katharina Volk, *Ovid* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 57.

> Like a number of Romantic novels—for example, Mme de Stäel's *Corinne*, Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*, and Shelley's *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein—The Wrongs of Woman* highlights individuals' powerful need to have an addressee who is either physically or imaginatively present during the act of self-narration. All the stories of suffering in Wollstonecraft's novel are told to or written for a specific listener or reader, and it is the sufferer's hope for a sympathetic and responsive addressee and the longing for a reciprocal relationship that form the basis for a community of suffering. Narration, then, is evoked as a means of connecting with others and a possible pathway to recovery.[414]

Maria and Jemima bond over their shared affliction: while Jemima is initially 'sophisticated into misanthropy', she is sensitive to 'the sufferings of a wretched mother', and her own story of abortion touches Maria.[415] Maria's uncertainty as to 'whether I shall have an opportunity of instructing you' can be understood as a form of maternal legacy wherein the bond forged between Maria and Jemima is hypothetically passed down onto the next generation. Unlike *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, the stories for Laurette are explicitly designed for a child reader; nevertheless, they are equally interested in maternal (Ceres) and paternal (the Traveller) loss. Although *Maurice* is not female–centric, the affective possibilities of shared suffering is an important plot point. Maurice is 'thrown on the wide world' after he flees the Smithson cottage, while Old Barnet laments that 'the old cottage under the cliff had become quite hateful to him since his dame's death'; they bond over their shared suffering and maintain a close relationship until Old Barnet dies.[416] This intimates that storytelling is predicated on an empathetic exchange of shared loss.

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[414] Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words*, p. 102.
[415] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), p. 167.
[416] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, pp. 64-65.

Shared suffering is an important plot point not only in the stories for Laurette, but also in Fenwick's *Visits to the Juvenile Library.* While there is no documented evidence to suggest that Shelley read Fenwick's book, both interrogate themes of maternal and paternal loss. In the sixth chapter of *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, Mr Benson relates Mrs Clifford's maidenhood and marriage before turning to 'the dreadful event which Mrs Clifford, pious and resigned as she is, never can contemplate without tears of anguish'. Mrs Clifford had 'a little girl, lovely as a cherub, and promising to be all that a mother's fond hopes could desire', but she was 'snatched away—not by death…but the lovely babe was stolen from their protecting roof—it was supposed—by a gang of gypsies'. Since that time, Mr Benson says, 'Mrs Clifford has renounced the gaieties of the world' and uses her 'large fortune' to care for the poor.[417] The story of Mrs Clifford's lost daughter, as well as how it allows her to exercise her 'feeling heart' on the poor, stimulates empathy and compassion in the Mortimer children:

> Caroline could only reply to this appeal by bowing her head. Her tears were flowing for good Mrs Clifford's afflictions, and she was resolving in her own mind to render herself worthy of Mrs Clifford's love and protection.
>
> Nor were the brothers of Caroline at all less affected by the recital, or more backward in good resolutions; and if Mrs Clifford could, in that moment, have rend the hearts of the Mortimers', she would have felt the highest satisfaction in contemplating the prospect of their future worth by the generous feelings that now expanded their breasts, and taught them to wish they might emulate the virtues they so justly admired.[418]

Lessons in empathy gain more poignancy in stories featuring grieving parents, such as Mrs Clifford's, where the Mortimer children—and by extension the child reader—are encouraged

[417] Eliza Fenwick, *Visits to the Juvenile Library; or, Knowledge Proved to be the Source of Happiness* (London: Tabart & Co., 1805), pp. 88-90.
[418] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

to think about their social and familial relationships with others. This endorses Kiser's 'shared frame' insofar as each member of the group learns to 'understand each other's actions and emotions'.[419] The loss of Mrs Clifford's daughter strengthens her bond with the Mortimers, thus substantiating the idea that storytelling is a cathartic medium through which the parents of a lost child (Mr and Mrs Clifford) can recreate the family unit. Nevertheless, Mrs Clifford's avoidance of 'gaieties', such as going to the theatre to see *The Life of Carlo, the Famous Dog of Drury-Lane* (1804) with the Mortimers, implies that the happiness of Mrs Clifford—and the resolution of the story—depends upon the recovery of her long-lost daughter.

Elizabeth notes how'[t]he attention to seeing suffering that permeated the abolitionist and animal rights movements also pervaded educational and medical discourse' in the Romantic period.[420] This is helpful as it sheds light on how shared suffering and loss could mediate social and familial communities. This is evident in *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, where the Mortimer children identify Mrs Clifford's suffering as a sign of her compassion for others. The opening scene of *Maurice*, in which the Traveller sees Maurice at Old Barnet's funeral procession in the village, is likewise predicated on seeing the suffering of others:

> [The Traveller] entered the inn, and asking for dinner, unbuckled his wallet, & sat down to rest himself near the door. While he was thus sitting a funeral passed by: it was evidently the funeral of a poor person; the coffin was carried by some peasants, and four mourners followed. Three of these although serious, looked careless and indifferent; the fourth was a boy of about thirteen years of age; he was crying, & was so much taken up by his own distress that he did not observe any thing that passed near him.

[419] Laurel J. Kiser, et al., 'Who Are We, But For the Stories We Tell', p. 4.
[420] Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 10.

> Something in this boy's appearance attracted the traveller's attention; and once when he ceased crying and looked round towards the inn door, the traveller thought that he had seldom seen so beautiful a youth. He turned to the landlady, and asked, whose was that funeral? And who was the boy that accompanied it?

While Markey claims that Shelley endorses 'the role that removal from the domestic hearth plays in the education and socialisation of the young', I would argue that the family plays an important part in the affective interactions between Maurice and the Traveller.[421] The Traveller enquires about Maurice after watching him at the funeral procession; this initiates the eventual meeting between them and the discovery that they are biologically related. The collective narrative structure of *Maurice* and *Visits to the Juvenile Library* suggests that Shelley and Fenwick are interested not only in 'seeing suffering' but also in telling suffering.

The affective interactions between Maurice and the Traveller, and the realisation that they are father and son, demonstrates the significance of visual and verbal communication:

> 'I will not tire you, my little friend, with the account of my walks and anxieties for this last fortnight; during which I have been employed in going all over Devonshire tracing my lost child; my labours have been unsuccessful. I am now going to return to Dame Smithson to ask whether he has returned to her. This is my story; do you consent to come and live with me? If I never find my darling boy you shall be a son to me, and if I do find him—'
>
> Maurice had listened to this relation very attentively, and near the end his eyes had streamed with tears and he showed every sign of interest and impatience: and now when the traveller said these words he threw himself into

[421] Anne Markey, 'Migration and Maternal Absence', p. 167.

> his arms and sobbed out—'I am your son! Daddy Smithson is not my father! I am your lost boy!'—[422]

Seeing suffering is doubly significant in *Maurice*. It refers to visual signs of emotion (like tears) as well as the tracing of genetic similarities. Although Maurice and Proserpine have positive social bonds, Shelley nevertheless privileges the blood family. This is also true of Mrs Clifford's story, where Mr Benson exclaims, 'Who but a parent can conceive the misery of such a loss!'[423] The recovery of lost children, and the recovery of their stories, is made possible only through their reunion with the blood family.

While it is well established in Romantic criticism that the child is 'configured and situated as almost necessarily at a remove, spatially and temporally, from adulthood', as Madeleine Wood rightly points out, 'childhood is not simply a lost realm, being someone's 'child' is a structural position in the family'.[424] This idea of spatial separation thus takes on more significance in stories about child abduction, where the child is physically removed from the family unit. Mr Clifford's travels across the 'the whole kingdom, searching every obscure village, as well as every populous town, and constantly advertising his child, offering immense rewards for her restoration' is comparable to the Traveller's walks 'from village to village', where he never passes 'a solitary cottage without looking at the children, and ask questions concerning them'.[425] The Traveller's story highlights the significance of space and spatial separation:

> When we returned we were dreadfully frightened to find the nurse asleep among some hay and no child near her. We awoke the woman and she became

[422] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 84.
[423] Eliza Fenwick, *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, p. 89.
[424] Andrew O'Malley, 'Crusoe's Children: *Robinson Crusoe* and the Culture of Childhood in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 87-100 (p. 90); Madeleine Wood, *Parents and Children in the Mid-Victorian Novel: Traumatic Encounters and the Formation of a Family* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 2.
[425] Eliza Fenwick, *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, p. 89; Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 105.

> pale with fear and trembled all over when she found the child gone; since he had gone to sleep in her arms, and she, without thinking of the danger, and lulled to sleep by the sun, had at last fallen asleep also. The first thing we did was to run to the river;—but I will not describe to you, my little friend, the great grief we felt during this search. We did not find our child, or see any remains of him near the water; on the contrary we found one of his little shoes in a field about a mile from the river, and this made us think that perhaps he was stolen. We spent many months in searching the whole country, but in vain, we could not hear any tidings of our dear, lost boy. [426]

The Traveller's search is mirrored in Dame Smithson's story, who resorts to stealing Maurice after she fakes a pregnancy in a letter to her husband, who is away at sea. During a stroll in Ilfracombe, Dame Smithson 'found our poor baby asleep in the arms of his careless nurse' and kidnaps him, after which she travels to Plymouth.[427] The Traveller's desire to recover Maurice is therefore paralleled with Dame Smithson's fear of discovery. Space is likewise important in *Proserpine*, where Proserpine's wandering off stage to 'pass that yawning cave and seek the spring/of Arethuse' signals the moment of her abduction.[428] The enclosed space of the stage further serves to highlight the effect of Proserpine's kidnapping, as Ceres and the nymphs wander in search for the lost girl. This points to a different type of wandering, where a parent either searches for their lost child (Mr and Mrs Clifford, Ceres, the Traveller) or searches for a child to supply a vacant place in the family (Dame Smithson). It also suggests that spatial proximity is rooted in blood proximity.

Parental grief allows Shelley to interrogate themes of child absence. Importantly, neither Ceres nor the Traveller are present when their child is abducted: as such, they must

[426] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, pp. 79-80.
[427] Ibid., pp. 80-82.
[428] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 19.

rely on others, such as Arethusa and Dame Smithson, to provide information about their lost children. The next section turns to the character of Dame Smithson. It explores how Dame Smithson deviates from Shelley's other childless characters, and how she is erased from the story of family recovery.

3.1b. Parents Who Want Children

Although childlessness can denote the parent(s) of a lost or dead child, as Rachel Bowlby remarks, it 'refers most often…not to losing children but wanting them—or sometimes, neutrally, simply to not having them'.[429] This in turn broadens the concept of the parental search. In *Maurice*, the plot converges not only on the Traveller's search for his lost son but also a childless woman's search for a 'pretended child'.[430] As such the lost child operates differently in Dame Smithson's story, where absence is created by the lack of a child in her family. This subsection analyses the role that Dame Smithson plays in the narrative. Maurice's biological mother is not given a narratorial role and therefore does not articulate her grief like Ceres and the Traveller do; Dame Smithson, however, *is* given a voice, for her story is told to Maurice by the Traveller. This gestures towards a counternarrative to stories about parents who search for their children.

During the period that Shelley wrote the stories for Laurette, she began a biblical translation known as 'The Samuel Fragment' (c. 1819–1820), based on the Book of Samuel. The first leaf of the manuscript, now missing, would have opened with the childless Hannah yearning for a son, who vows that if she is given one, she will deliver him to the service of God. A.A. Markley observes that Shelley may have been drawn to the story for 'personal reasons', suggesting that it was intended as a possible supplement to Godwin's *Bible Stories* (1802) and the stories for Laurette, although it is uncertain whether 'The Samuel Fragment'

[429] Rachel Bowlby, *A Child of One's Own: Parental Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 104.
[430] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 81.

had a child readership in mind.[431] Markley points out that Shelley read the Bible 'intensively…during July–August 1819, after the death of William Shelley, and the beginning of 1820, after the birth of Percy Florence'. [432] 'The Samuel Fragment' thus may have offered Shelley an opportunity to explore themes of maternity, loss, and suffering. Another possible reason for her interest may have been in Hannah's methods of communication. After all, the Bible is a composite of different stories and narrators. In the Book of Samuel, Hannah speaks of her 'bitterness of soul' not to her husband Elkanah but to God, although this is in the form of an internal prayer. Read in this context, Hannah can be placed alongside characters like Ceres, who asks Jove to 'Restore my child, or let all heaven sink!'[433] While Hannah uses a silent form of communication (a prayer) to have a child, Ceres uses speech to articulate the grief of losing hers. This points to Shelley's interest in narratives of reproduction (Hannah) and restoration (Ceres). *Maurice* can be positioned within this spectrum of reproduction and restoration, for the plot converges on a parent who seeks to recover their child as well as a woman who desires a child; but unlike Hannah, Dame Smithson abducts a child to fulfil her wish. Though Tamara Wagner argues that nineteenth–century authors use child–stealing to indict baby farmers, unregulated adoption and 'questionable charitable agencies' that exploited real children, Shelley's incorporation of the abductor's story puts the social family under scrutiny.[434] As such it is not only the child but the family unit itself that is at stake.

While Markey argues that the exclusion of Maurice's biological mother from the plot indicates that 'maternal influence is not always a force for good', I would suggest that the text is more concerned with childlessness and the family unit.[435] I agree with Turner that

[431] A.A. Markley, 'Uncollected Prose, Translations, Part-authored and Attributed Writings', in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings,* 4 vols, ed. by Nora Crook, Pamela Clemit, and A.A. Markley (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), p. lii.
[432] Ibid., p. li.
[433] Mary Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 31.
[434] Tamara S. Wagner, *The Victorian Baby in Print: Infancy, Infant Care, and Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 27-28.
[435] Anne Markey, 'Migration and Maternal Absence', p. 171.

Shelley draws 'a distinction between *being* a parent and being *as* a parent'.[436] This is suggested when the Traveller describes how Dame Smithson 'loved our poor boy as if he had been her own and took all possible care of him—caressing and tending him *with the tenderness of a mother*' (my emphasis).[437] Dame Smithson's story reveals the lengths that people go to to have a child of their own, even if it is at the expense of others. She occupies an uneasy position in the narrative. Neither a wicked nor 'monstrous' stepmother, she is at best a surrogate and at worst a maternal imitator, thus substantiating 'the essentialist argument for motherhood…that a surrogate mother cannot hold the place of a biological mother in the family'.[438] In so doing Shelley at once reinforces and challenges the cultural valorisation of the family unit, as Dame Smithson feels compelled to steal a child to stop the abuse she suffers at the hands of Daddy Smithson but does so without 'caring for the unhappiness of its parents'.[439] The Traveller tells Maurice that,

> 'Her husband had been a sailor and they had lived several years together and had had no children: he was a bad man, and would beat and reproach her for not having a child, which made her very unhappy, and she thought that she would be perfectly happy if heaven would bless her with a son. At length once when her husband went on a long voyage, she wrote to him a month after his departure and told him that she was with child.['][440]

Carlson's observation that 'Maurice's origins and existence *are* the products of writing' is perceptive.[441] The child in Dame Smithson's letter does not physically exist: hence she kidnaps the Traveller's son to supply the vacant place of her fictional one. *Maurice* is not only a story about a lost child; Maurice himself is a product of storytelling. Although

[436] Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood*, p. 168.
[437] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 83.
[438] Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, p. 139.
[439] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 82.
[440] Ibid., p. 81.
[441] Julie Carlson, *England's First Family*, p. 250.

storytelling facilitates a reunion between the Traveller and Maurice, it also facilitated his abduction. While Shelley's use of letter–writing in *Maurice* harks back to the frame narrative of *Frankenstein*, where the stories of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature are reported in letters from Robert Walton to Margaret Walton Saville, it is also integral to the abduction plot. Unlike *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, where Maria attempts to process the loss of her daughter by writing a memoir, in *Maurice* the writing of letters instigates the abduction of a child. In this context *Maurice* speaks to Wood's analysis of *Dombey and Son* (1846–48), a novel which centres on Dombey's wish for a son to inherit his shipping firm: 'how 'children' (in infancy, youth and adulthood) are created, written–on, broken and nurtured by the elder generation'.[442] This signifies that plot progression depends upon familial origins; in the case of orphans and foundlings, or abductees like Maurice, the resolution of the plot depends upon the (re)discovery of these origins.

Even though Dame Smithson is given a voice, and treats Maurice 'as' a mother, she is ultimately excluded from the narrative of family recovery. This is because Maurice belongs to his 'good, kind' middle–class parents, 'with whom he now lived in content and happiness'.[443] Alice Diver's assertion that the trope of infertility and childlessness in European fairy tales 'simply confirm that certain *others*—related or otherwise—should remain outside of the familial' rings true in *Maurice*.[444] Although Diver's comment here is in relation to the wicked stepmother, a figure that Dame Smithson does not neatly align with, the closing lines of *Maurice* suggest that the resolution of the story depends upon the recovery of the biological family unit. A comparison with Fenwick's *Visits to the Juvenile Library* is once again useful. In the final chapter Mrs Clifford and the Mortimers meet a 'dear little girl' who colours pictures to support her mother. The girl tells them that her mother is very ill and asks for help.

[442] Madeleine Wood, *Parents and Children in the Mid-Victorian Novel*, p. 142.
[443] Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 88.
[444] Alice Diver, *Genetic Stigma in Law and Literature: Orphanhood, Adoption, and the Right to Reunion* (Cham: Springer, 2023), p. 4.

That Mrs Clifford's heart is 'thrilled' by the 'sweet' tones of the girl's voice hints that she is her long-lost daughter because it suggests an instinctive maternal response. This revelation is confirmed when Mrs Clifford discovers that the girl's mother is Mrs Lawson, a relation of Mr Clifford's who had 'invented the basest lies' about Mrs Clifford out of jealousy during their early married years:

> 'For the sake of that dear child,' said Mrs Clifford, 'to whom my heart already gives its affections.—'
>
> 'Dost thou know who she is?' asked Mrs Lawson, in a frantic manner.
>
> 'Is she not your daughter?' replied Mrs Clifford, 'is she not a dutiful, amiable, and affectionate child, and entitled to love and esteem? And are you not poor and distressed, and therefore have a right to my services?'
>
> 'No,' cried Mrs Lawson, rising, 'I am entitled to nothing from you but indignation and vengeance. Do you remember the hour when I departed from your roof, and instigated by my diabolical passions, I vowed eternal hatred against you?'
>
> Mrs Clifford shuddered, but did not speak.
>
> 'And I had my revenge—and how has that cruel revenge repaid me? Day and night have the torments of a guilty conscience pursued my footsteps, and banished sleep from my eye-lids. No, not one moment of peace has ever cheered this wretched bosom since the hour—the cruel hour, when I—stole—your child.'[445]

[445] Eliza Fenwick, *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, pp. 101-102.

The story ends with an emotional reunion between Mrs Clifford and Ellen. Although Mrs Lawson becomes 'a sincere penitent' like Dame Smithson, who laments that she has 'been very miserable as well as wicked', both are ultimately erased from the family story: this is further suggested by the fact that their sudden deaths are explained in a few short sentences.[446] Arthur Mortimer blesses 'the happy day, when with good Mrs Clifford we paid a second visit to Tabart's Juvenile Library'.[447] While this is in part a marketing ploy for Benjamin Tabart's bookselling business, it also points to the centrality of storytelling in narratives about lost children and family recovery. The same is also true of *Maurice*, where the Traveller first learns of Maurice after listening to one of the locals, and his subsequent encounter with Maurice leads to the resolution of the story as well as the resolution of familial origins. Without Tabart's Juvenile Library, and without asking the local in the tavern about Maurice, Mrs Clifford and the Traveller would not have found their lost children. Sites of storytelling therefore become sites of familial reunion.

Despite the different familial and social relationships in *Maurice*, Shelley uses storytelling to privilege the instinctive bond between biological parents and their children. Giving Dame Smithson a voice allows Shelley to interrogate different forms of childlessness and absence: here the parent does not search for a lost child, but searches for a child to supply a vacant place in the family. Nevertheless, the Traveller ultimately takes parental precedence. That Shelley includes these dual perspectives of parenting and childlessness in *Maurice* points to the multiplicity of the family unit in her fiction and leads to a reassessment of what *type* of family is recovered.

Chapter Conclusion

[446] Ibid., p. 106; Mary Shelley, *Maurice*, p. 83.
[447] Eliza Fenwick, *Visits to the Juvenile Library*, p. 107.

Storytelling is an integral component of tales about lost children and their grieving parents. This points to new ways of thinking about the prevalence of frame narratives in Romantic period literature—especially that aimed at children—and the function it provides. Narration and storytelling in *Proserpine* and *Maurice* drives the search for and eventual reunion with a lost child, as their parents piece information together to locate their child's whereabouts. However, the differences in Proserpine's and Maurice's abductions demonstrates that the lost child is not a monolithic figure; rather, it can be used to interrogate various forms of absence and recovery. Though Ceres and Proserpine are reunited, Proserpine's compulsory residence in the underworld for half of the year suggests that the lost child cannot be wholly recuperated by their parent(s). By contrast, *Maurice* is primarily concerned with the (re)discovery of parental origins. In so doing Shelley ultimately privileges the biological family unit, regardless of the positive social relationships Maurice forges. In both texts, the lost child's journey—Proserpine's abduction to the underworld and Maurice's journey from the Smithsons to Old Barnet to his biological father—have implications for their parent(s). Mirroring their child's wandering, the grieving parents wander in search of their lost child. The resolution of the story therefore depends upon the resolution of the family unit, even if it is only partial (as is the case in *Proserpine*).

While Shelley's preoccupation with maternal absence is well noted, *Proserpine* and *Maurice* are stories about absent children. This offers a counter reading of parents and parent figures in Shelley's fiction. Shelley depicts multiple types of parenting in the stories for Laurette. *Proserpine* focuses on an intimate maternal commune of storytelling, consisting of mother and daughter and nymphs. Maurice is kidnapped by a childless woman who wants a baby to put an end to her husband's abuse: she treats and cares for Maurice as her own, although she is erased from the narrative of family recovery. Moreover, childlessness is a major theme in both texts. Ceres and the Traveller can be understood as childless insofar as

their children are lost, while Dame Smithson does not have children of her own. These different forms of childlessness allow Shelley to explore familial absence and to ultimately privilege the bond between parents and children. *Proserpine* and *Maurice* are therefore interested not only in the lost child but also the parents that lose them. The next chapter continues to think about parental mourning in relation to Shelley's travelogue, *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844). It argues that Shelley's self-fashioning as a widowed mother enables her to ruminate on different forms of loss. Moreover, it extends my previous idea of absence and presence by suggesting that while Shelley mourned the absence of her deceased husband and children, her grief was tempered by the presence of her surviving son Percy Florence.

Chapter 4: Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844) as Textual Monument to Loss

The previous chapter traced a rhetoric of parental loss in Shelley's *Proserpine* and *Midas*. This chapter considers Shelley's relational role as widowed mother to dead and living children. Writing in her 'Journal of Sorrow' from Brighton in 1840, Mary Shelley wonders if 'the beloved dead…gather round one on such an evening, & make part of that atmosphere of love, so hushed, so soft, on which the soul reposes & is blessed'.[448] Shelley had come to Brighton in preparation for a continental tour with her surviving son Percy Florence and his friends. This tour resulted in the publication of *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844), a travel memoir written in support of Italian patriot Ferdinando Gatteschi. Documenting her return to Italy and journey through the Rhine, *Rambles* is a narrative of loss and restoration.

This chapter explores the function of loss and absence in *Rambles*. Drawing upon my suggestion in the introductory chapter that Coleridge and Shelley present themselves as widowed mothers, this chapter investigates the multiplicity of Shelley's maternal persona. In so doing I reconfigure Mitzi Myers' articulation of the 'Percy's-wife' and 'Daddy's girl' approach to Shelley by considering the multiplicity of her maternal persona.[449] I trace different iterations of this persona in Shelley's post-1822 life writing, namely her 'Journal of Sorrow' (1822-1841) and biographical projects. I use the term 'life writing' throughout this chapter because of the thematic overlaps *Rambles* shares with Shelley's journals and correspondence. I read Shelley's widowed maternal persona within the wider context of suffering mothers in the period, namely Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), which reckons with the absence of her

[448] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* p. 56.
[449] Mitzi Myers, 'Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin-Shelley: The Female Author between Public and Private Spheres', in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 160-172 (p. 160).

lover Gilbert Imlay and her projected future as a single mother to their baby daughter Fanny. As well as considering the personas of Wollstonecraft and Shelley, I also trace a narrative of maternal loss in Shelley's descriptions of art in *Rambles*, particularly in her accounts of the Virgin Mary and Niobe. In so doing this chapter aims to illustrate the different forms of absence that emerge in Shelley's post-1822 body of writing.

My reading of memory and absence in *Rambles* is indebted to scholarship on nineteenth century cultures of memorialisation. Particularly useful for the purposes of this chapter is Julian North's argument that Shelley's editions of her husband's *Posthumous Poems* (1824) and *Poetical Works* (1839) attempt to reconstitute 'the physical presence of the dead'.[450] By this she means that biography allows the subject's presence to be felt. I extend North's thesis by suggesting that in *Rambles* Percy Bysshe Shelley's presence—and the presence of William and Clara Shelley—is evoked through memory rather than a figurative 'resurrection' of their bodies. In *Rambles*, the 'beloved dead' are conjured through association.[451] I move beyond the generic specifics of travel writing by considering how memory functions in Shelley's post-1822 life writing, such as her 'Journal of Sorrow' (1822-1841), begun after Percy Bysshe Shelley's death. In so doing this chapter seeks to highlight the significance of absent presences in *Rambles* and the 'Journal of Sorrow', by which I mean how the memory of dead loved ones looms large.

This chapter therefore contributes to recent and ongoing scholarship on Shelley's post-1822 life writing. Although *Rambles* remains understudied, it has received some critical attention in recent years. In her discussion of Shelley's Anglo-Italian politics, Maria Schoina observes that Shelley fluctuates 'between self-assertion and self-concealment' so as to 'advocate the Italian cause without endangering the reputation of its woman author'. These

[450] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 118.
[451] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, I*, p. 99.

fluctuations, according to Schoina, 'disclose the tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions that underpin the fashioning of the Anglo-Italian'.[452] Schoina's study of Shelley's Anglo-Italianness points to how *Rambles* negotiates different authorial identities and self-representations. Much of the scholarship produced on *Rambles* acknowledges these nuances; for instance, Clarissa Campbell Orr reads it in the context of nineteenth century literary celebrity and how Shelley moves between the private and public realms of writing. Elizabeth Dolan suggests that Shelley's fluctuation between 'expression and effacement, visibility and invisibility' is 'the narrative embodiment between what is known and unknown in trauma'.[453] By this she means that Shelley indirectly refers to her personal losses rather than displaying them for public scrutiny. This chapter argues that Shelley's oscillation between revelation and concealment in *Rambles* is symptomatic of a broader trend in her post-1822 life writing, which moves between grief and consolation.

Section 1.1a, 'Mary Shelley's post-1822 Life Writing' provides an overview of Shelley's journalistic practices in the decades following Percy Bysshe Shelley's death. The 'generic permeability' of travel writing, which crosses the boundaries of autobiography and letter-writing, invites a reassessment of the broader thematic trends in Shelley's later non-fiction.[454] I trace a persistent language of absence and maternal loss in her life writing, including the 'Journal of Sorrow' and a selection of the biographical projects she undertook in the 1830s. Section 1.1b and 2.1a, 'Women's Travel Writing and Maternal Grief' and 'Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and Maternal Restoration', explore the function of Shelley's persona as a widowed mother in *Rambles*. By situating Shelley in the context of other suffering mothers, including Wordsworth's female vagrants, Charlotte Smith's poems to her daughter

[452] Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians': Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p. 72; p. 87.
[453] Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 133-134.
[454] Amy Culley, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 148.

Anna Augusta, and Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence*, I aim to demonstrate how *Rambles* operates as a narrative of loss and restoration. Section 2.1a, 'Fanny Imlay and Percy Florence as Embodiments of Past and Future' considers the role of Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's children in *A Short Residence* and *Rambles* respectively, arguing that they function as vehicles of memory. Section 3.1a, 'Maternal Monuments' identifies a language of loss in Shelley's art criticism, namely in relation to the Virgin Mary and Niobe. Through a comparison with Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Notes on Sculptures' (1819), I suggest that art provided Shelley with an iconographic example of grieving maternity that could be adapted to her own personal circumstances.

1.1a. Mary Shelley's post-1822 Life Writing and the Curation of Loss

This section provides a brief overview of Shelley's post-1822 life writing, to which *Rambles* belongs. Given that memoirs were often based on personal correspondence, it is worth considering the broader thematic trends in Shelley's life writing of this period. As Shelley continued to use the 'Journal of Sorrow' sporadically at the time of her departure in 1840 and drew upon specific passages in the journal for inclusion in *Rambles*, an exploration of her journalistic practices in the years following Percy Bysshe Shelley's death is necessary. In so doing this section aims to highlight the significance of absence in the 'Journal of Sorrow' and *Rambles*.

Shelley's post-1822 journals differ from her previous ones due to the physical absence of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Where before Shelley's journals were largely collaborative, the 'Journal of Sorrow' is written by herself alone. Magdalena Ożarska has analysed the changes in Shelley's journalistic writing from 1814 to the 1840s, arguing that the 'Journal of Sorrow' is 'often retrospective and confessional'.[455] Many of the early entries are addressed to Percy

[455] Magdalena Ożarska, *Lacework or Mirror? Diary Poetics of Frances Burney, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 215.

Bysshe Shelley, including 'Where are you Shelley?', 'my only one', 'my divine Shelley', and 'Angelic one', among others.[456] For Anna Mercer, the 'Journal of Sorrow' provides an insight into both Shelley's new role as a widow and Percy Bysshe Shelley's continued posthumous influence. Mercer's analysis points to an inherent paradox in Shelley's post-1822 life writing, in which Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'dual absence and uncanny presence provide her with an inner voice, drawn from memory and his poetry, through which their literary collaboration continues'.[457] This in turn signifies the importance of absent presences in Shelley's life writing during her widowed years, which documents her figurative and eventual physical return to Italy, as described in *Rambles*. As 'Mrs Shelley' she is immediately identified as Percy Bysshe Shelley's widow; yet she never explicitly describes her past, instead choosing to allude to her losses through the evocation of memory, as I discuss in the subsequent sections of this chapter. The absent presences of Percy Bysshe Shelley and their children lingers in Shelley's post-1822 life writing, which moves between past, present, and future and reckons with her changed personal circumstances.

The first page of the 'Journal of Sorrow' reveals that it is predicated on absence. As Heather Bozant Witcher intimates, '[i]n the absence of physical fellowship and the circles that she once helped to create, she devotes herself to paper: asking her journal to be her confidant, for the paper to sympathize with her'.[458] The first page of the journal reads:

> I have now no friend. For eight years I communicated with unlimited freedom with one whose genius, far transcending mine, awakened & guided my thoughts; I conversed with him; rectified my errors of judgment, obtained new lights from him, & my mind was satisfied. Now I am alone! Oh, how alone!

[456] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844: II*, p. 444; p. 448; p. 454; p. 497.
[457] Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 144.
[458] Heather Bozant Witcher, *Collaborative Writing in the Long Nineteenth Century: Sympathetic Partnerships and Artistic Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 63.

> The stars may behold my tears, & the winds drink my sighs—but my thoughts are a sealed treasure which I can confide to none. White paper—wilt thou be my confident? I will trust thee fully, for none shall see what I write.[459]

The confessional mode that Shelley adopts in the 'Journal of Sorrow' differs from that of *Rambles*, which was aimed at a public audience. Modifying personal letters into public ones required some details to be omitted and others to be expanded upon for narrative purposes. Nevertheless, *Rambles* offers glimpses into Shelley's past. It too is predicated on absence, with Shelley's return to Italy gaining additional poignancy in the light of Percy Bysshe Shelley's death and those of their children, William and Clara. In the first letter of volume one, Shelley notes that 'instead of the cheerful voices of the living, I have dwelt among the early tombs of those I love'.[460] This points to the significance of absent presences in Shelley's post-1822 life writing, which attempts to partially restore the presence of the dead through memory and text. This rhetoric had emerged earlier in the 'Journal of Sorrow', in which the 'white paper' provides a medium through which Shelley can address her deceased husband.

In Shelley's post-1822 life writing Italy is imbued with the presence of the dead. That Shelley describes Italy as both 'murdress of those I love & of all my happiness' and as 'compensation for these miserable days' indicates her conflicted emotional response towards the country.[461] Shortly before her return to England in July 1823 Shelley wrote to Jane Williams that '[h]e must be there, dearest Jane—he loved his mists & airs—its promontories—its clearness—& its beauty—and methinks I feel his spirit wandering will [with] the spirit of loveliness about the caves & solitudes of these shores—'[462] In her elegiac poem 'The Choice' (1823), Shelley likewise presents Italy as her 'true' home as it is where

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[459] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* p. 429.
[460] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 2.
[461] Mary Shelley, May 1824, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, II*, pp. 476-477.
[462] Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, in 3 vols (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 342.

her dead loved ones are buried. Written in the 'Journal of Sorrow', the poem commemorates the deaths of Percy Bysshe Shelley, William, Clara, and Allegra Byron, who had passed away in Bagnacavallo in April 1822. In it, Shelley conceives of herself as 'A wanderer—here, no more I seek an home/The sky a vault—& Italy a tomb!'[463] By identifying herself as a 'wanderer' Shelley suggests that her sense of displacement is exacerbated by loss. That she frames Italy as both 'the black death' and 'the haven of my rest' provides further evidence of her ambiguity towards Italy.[464] For Graham Allen, Shelley presents Italy as 'a form of reversibility', by which he means that it is at once a place of death and a place of renewal.[465] This line of thought is developed in *Rambles*, which documents Shelley's return to Italy. Her visit to the Tremezzo demonstrates this emotional oscillation. On approaching the Villa Pliniana Shelley writes that '[s]ometimes these thoughts and these revisitings were full of inexpressible sadness; a yearning after the past…Just now, my mind was differently attuned; the young and gay were around; and in them I lived and enjoyed'.[466] Moving between the past and the present, *Rambles* draws attention to Shelley's persona as a widowed mother.

Although Shelley's post-1822 life writing evokes the presence of Percy Bysshe Shelley, her children—living and dead—also loom large. The journal's epitaph, 'The Journal of Sorrow—/Begun 1822/But for my Child it could not/End too soon' positions Shelley as both widow and mother.[467] Peppered throughout Shelley's early addresses to Percy Bysshe Shelley in the 'Journal of Sorrow' are references to Percy Florence. In an entry from October 1822, Shelley wonders, 'Oh my child—what is your fate to be? You alone keep me—you are the only chain that links me to time—but for you I should be free'.[468] This rhetoric is also apparent in Coleridge's correspondence from the time of her mother's death. As she explains

[463] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 490.
[464] Ibid., p. 493.
[465] Graham Allen, 'Mary Shelley as Elegiac Poet: The Return and 'The Choice'', *Romanticism*, 13 (2007), 219-232 (p. 224).
[466] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, 89.
[467] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 428.
[468] Ibid., 433.

to her brother-in-law, 'I feel now more than ever the longing to go & join them that are gone—but for my children'.[469] Coleridge's and Shelley's impulse to die is thus tempered by the presence of their children.

Shelley's journal entry for December 1822 begins with a recollection of Edward Williams (who had drowned with Percy Bysshe Shelley) before moving to 'my own boy!' Shelley then promises to 'collect my materials' in 'commemoration of the divine virtues of your father'.[470] Although Percy Florence did not read the 'Journal of Sorrow' as a child, several of the early entries include addresses to him. Past and present intermingle throughout the early parts of the 'Journal of Sorrow', with Shelley moving between memories of her husband and their coterie to her situation with Percy Florence and their future prospects. The references to Percy Florence become more frequent as the journal progresses, particularly regarding his anticipated inheritance of the Shelley baronetcy. Percy Florence is present throughout *Rambles*, referred to as 'my son' or simply 'P—'. I analyse Percy Florence's role in Shelley's travel memoir in more detail in section 2.1b of this chapter. Shelley's frequent mentions of Percy Florence in the 'Journal of Sorrow' is testament to the different presences that surrounded her. Though Mercer's study of the Shelleys' collaborative practices situates Percy Bysshe Shelley as a continued presence in his widow's life, her children are additional presences. William and Clara are evoked in 'The Choice' and in *Rambles*, while Percy Florence remains physically present. This in turn sheds light on the co-existing personas that Shelley adopts in the years following her husband's death, situating herself both as the widow 'Mrs Shelley' and mother to dead and living children.

Julian North's extensive analysis of Shelley's biographical output during her widowed years sheds light on her relational roles as widow and mother. In North's view, the 1839

[469] Sara Coleridge, 'To John Taylor Coleridge', 26 September 1845. Harry Ransom Center. (MS-0866, container 7.3-8.1).
[470] Ibid., p. 446.

edition of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Poetical Works* can be understood as a 'family memoir' in that Shelley dedicates it to Percy Florence and invites readers to sympathize with their loss.[471] The dedication reads,

To Percy Florence Shelley

The Poetical Works

Of His Illustrious Father

Are Dedicated

By His Affectionate Mother

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley[472]

Michelle Levy argues that the dedication attempts to circumvent charges of Percy Bysshe Shelley's indifference towards his children by his first marriage by presenting him as 'an ideal father'.[473] However, it also establishes Shelley as an authority on her husband's life and works. I would argue that the dedication expresses Shelley's persona as a widowed mother, positioning the *Poetical Works* not only as her husband's legacy, but also as a legacy for their son. Shelley's self-fashioning in the *Poetical Works* has some bearing on *Rambles*, which similarly negotiates this persona in accordance with feminine propriety.

1.1b. Women's Travel Writing and Maternal Grief

In *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (2007) Carl Thompson characterises the Romantic 'misadventurer' as a person who embarks on journeys where risk—or event death—is involved, such as shipwrecks, mountaineering, and piratical abduction. Thompson's articulation of the misadventurer as someone who 'had been through

[471] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius*, p. 117.
[472] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works*, *I*, ed. by Mary Shelley (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), p. vi.
[473] Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship*, p. 151.

a hugely revelatory, possibly even life-changing, test of character' is relevant to this chapter as it points to how travel had the potential to facilitate an individual's spiritual transformation.[474] This section broadens the critical understanding of the suffering traveller by exploring suffering maternal travellers. By situating Shelley's *Rambles* within the context of those written by other women—namely Wollstonecraft and Anne Grant—this section aims to highlight the centrality of loss and absence in her travel memoir. This is not to say that Shelley wrote because she was sad. Indeed, such an assumption has been challenged by recent critics like Schoina and Dolan, who have uncovered Shelley's engagement with Italian politics and continental travel. Instead, this section argues that Shelley's personal loss influences her responses to the environment. Just as Shelley's dream-like visit to a house triggers memories of a deceased 'friend' in her essay 'On Ghosts', so too does the Italian landscape revive memories of loss in *Rambles*.

As a form of autobiography, the travel memoir is deeply personal. Like many travel writers at the time, Shelley modified personal letters into public ones. This necessarily meant omitting some details and expanding upon others for narrative effect. The personal significance of travel writing gains additional poignancy in the case of who I will describe as 'suffering mothers', whose travels offer the possibility of recovery. There are different types of maternal suffering: while Wollstonecraft was in a suicidal frame of mind when she embarked on the journey to Scandinavia in 1795, Anne Grant and Shelley had both lost children. Hence, the spiritual recoveries that each woman undertakes is specific to her circumstances. Nevertheless, I will suggest that all three authors use the act of travelling to reflect on their personal losses.

[474] Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 273.

Anne Grant's *Letters from the Mountains* (1806) can be understood as a narrative of maternal loss. Although published in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Grant undertook her journey through the Highlands—and composed her letters—in the 1780s. Like Shelley, Grant's travels were marked by death. Foremost among these was the loss of her four-year-old son Patrick, a 'human wonder' who 'forsook its earthly prison, and mingled with its kindred angels' in May 1789. As she writes to one Mrs Smith:

> Were you as happy as your great worldly prosperity, the esteem of all that know you truly, can make you, you would be very unfit to enter into the present feelings of my heart, these acute returns of pain, these agonizing recollections, that darken the summer's sun, and throw a veil of universal sadness over the fair face of nature;—the recital of such sensations would form poor entertainment for a person engrossed or elated by the pleasures and gaieties of this world. Since writing the above, I went to Fort George [where Grant's father served], by *particular desire*; but, alas! I found, to my sorrow, that 'change of place is only change of pain.'[475]

In Grant's case, the Scottish landscape does not have a restorative effect; and, even if it did, it would not offer sufficient consolation for Patrick's death. Instead, Grant's surroundings are suffused with loss. This is suggested by Grant's quotation of David Mallet's *Mustapha* (1738-39), 'In change of place there is no change of pain'. The implication here is that Grant's immediate surroundings amplify rather than soothe her grief. This is also evident in Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's travel memoirs, although they manage to locate moments of solace.

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[475] Anne Grant, 'To Mrs Smith', 26 May 1789, in *Women's Travel Writings in Scotland: 'Letters from the Mountains' by Anne Grant and 'Letters from the North Highlands' by Elizabeth Isabella Spence*, ed. by Kirsteen McCue and Pamela Perkins (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 64.

Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's travel memoirs are particularly striking in that they often allude to, but do not fully explicate on, their suffering. Susan Civale's claim that *A Short Residence* gains 'affective power' in Wollstonecraft's 'self-portrayal as a mother' sheds light on the negotiation between private and public maternal personas.[476] Wollstonecraft obliquely references 'disappointments' rather than describing them in detail, as does Shelley in *Rambles*.[477] Written between two suicide attempts, *A Short Residence* sees Wollstonecraft journey to Scandinavia on behalf of her estranged lover Gilbert Imlay, who had become implicated in a 'mercantile adventure' when a cargo of silver disappeared on its way to Sweden.[478] Gilbert remains unidentified in the memoir and Wollstonecraft refers to their daughter without mentioning a husband or marriage. Although the Shelleys' literary reputation made them subjects of public interest, as Elizabeth Dolan observes, *Rambles* is 'unconsciously coded' insofar as past and present suffering is 'to be partially seen but not fully understood from the outside'.[479] Shelley refers at various points to 'recollections, long forgotten' and 'tearful associations'.[480] The degree of effacement that Shelley exhibits in *Rambles* is symptomatic of her biographical practices. In the Preface to the 1839 edition of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Poetical Works*, she insists that 'I abstain from any remark on the occurrences of his private life; except inasmuch as the passions which they engendered, inspired his poetry' before describing the 'warm affection' of his personality. As North observes, Shelley's simultaneous desire to withhold and introduce Percy Bysshe Shelley to a wider audience places him within an intimate domestic coterie 'personally known to few' that nevertheless resonates with the reading public.[481] This oscillation between concealment and

[476] Susan Civale, *Romantic Women's Life Writing: Reputation and Afterlife* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 92.
[477] Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark and Memoirs of the Author of* The Rights of Woman, ed. by Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 2005 [1987]), p. 129.
[478] William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of* The Rights of Woman, p. 248.
[479] Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era*, p. 135.
[480] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 61; *II*, p. 225.
[481] Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius*, p. 117.

revelation suggests that Shelley and Wollstonecraft were aware of the confessional implications of autobiographical modes. Moreover, it implies that personal loss can be detected in their travel memoirs, even if it is not referred to explicitly on the page.

According to Christine Chaney *A Short Residence* is a 'foundational document' in the history of Romantic autobiography. Her claim that Wollstonecraft's travel memoir 'shows her gaining knowledge and insight (as well as frustration and anguish) through a process of self-interlocution and confession, all in the midst of a patchwork of prosaic travel details' suggests that Wollstonecraft goes on an emotional, as well as physical, journey.[482] Furthermore, Chaney's remark that Wollstonecraft participates in 'a process of self-interlocution' sheds light on her authorial persona. As an abandoned mother, Wollstonecraft tells of her suffering to Gilbert and the wider reading public at large. This signifies the centrality of Wollstonecraft's travel memoir in the development of the suffering maternal persona.

Deborah Weiss asserts that Wollstonecraft's use of sentimentalism reconfigures the contemporaneous figure of the 'man of feeling', who observes and sympathizes with the suffering of others.[483] Wollstonecraft's persona recalls the archetype of abandoned women that proliferate in eighteenth century sentimental fiction.[484] By positioning herself on the spectrum of sentimental heroines, Wollstonecraft emphasises her persona as a suffering mother. Her suffering is often the product of memory and reflection. Fanny's absence triggers a meditation on female suffering, with Wollstonecraft admitting that 'I feel more than a mother's fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her

[482] Christine Chaney, 'The Intimate Familiar: Essay as Autobiography in Romanticism', in *Romantic Autobiography in England*, ed. by Eugene Stelzig (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 195-210 (p. 195).
[483] Deborah Weiss, 'Suffering, Sentiment, and Civilization: Pain and Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Short Residence*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 45 (2006), 199-221 (p. 216).
[484] Ibid., p. 205.

sex…Hapless woman! what a fate is thine'.[485] This emphasises Wollstonecraft's emotional sensitivity as well as a fusion between the personal and the political, insofar as Fanny becomes a means of reflecting on women's status in society. This fusion also occurs in *Rambles*, in which Percy Florence embodies Shelley's personal future and the future of Italy (I explore this in more detail in section 1.1b of this chapter).

The narratives of *A Short Residence* and *Rambles* rely upon the physical absence of figures from Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's past and present. Wollstonecraft's letters to an absent Gilbert Imlay reinforce her projected future as a single mother to their baby daughter; Shelley's letters reinforce her transition from wife to widowed mother. Writing in her 'Journal of Sorrow' during a brief return to London in 1841, Shelley confesses that 'living as I do with my son always absent alone with cursed past, alone with my sad remembrances I do not rejoice…alone alone—always alone—it will drive me mad'.[486] This reinforces her self-identification as the 'last man' of her coterie following Byron's death in 1824.[487] Although Shelley emphasises the joy she finds in the company of Percy Florence and his friends in *Rambles*, the absence of dead loves ones inspires solemn reflection. Approaching the Villa Diodati in Geneva, where the Shelleys had lived with Byron, John William Polidori, and Claire Clairmont in 1816, Shelley wonders, 'Was I the same person who had lived there, the companion of the dead? For all were gone…storm, and blight, and death, had passed over, and destroyed all'.[488] This glimpse into Shelley's past draws attention to her persona as a grieving woman.

While Wollstonecraft and Shelley write from a maternal perspective, Clotilda Elizabeth Stisted's *Letters from the Bye-ways of Italy* (1845) is written from the perspective of a daughter mourning her mother. Nevertheless, like *A Short Residence* and *Rambles*, the

[485]Mary Wollstonecraft *A Short Residence*, p. 97.
[486] Mary Shelley, journal entry for 14 February 1841, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 571.
[487] Ibid., p. 476.
[488] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 140.

narrative of *Bye-ways* is influenced by an absent presence. The recent death of Stisted's mother Catherine Stoney in 1841 haunts the narrative. In Letter Three, Stisted mourns her then living mother's 'absence when the charms of spring are coming forth' due to infirmity, meaning that Stisted and her husband had to travel alone. These peppered references to maternal absence anticipate Stoney's death, revealed in Letter Twenty-One. The letter begins with Stisted announcing the news that 'our 'beautiful evening star' has set to this world, to rise and shine for ever in the regions of eternal light!', before explaining that she will publish her letters to honour her mother's deathbed wish.[489] Apologising to her readers that 'I have too often saddened my page with allusions to one we have lost', Stisted's reminiscences compensate for her mother's physical absence during her travels.[490] The narrative's emphasis on mother-child relationships places it in conversation with *Rambles*, in which Shelley accompanies her son on his travels as she reflects on the loss of her other children. Although Wollstonecraft did not personally experience infant death, *A Short Residence* also broaches the subject of child absence. Fanny and Marguerite were absent for part of the journey. One evening, Wollstonecraft writes that her spirits had 'been harassed by various causes—by much thinking—nursing almost to madness—and even by a sort of weak melancholy that hung about my heart at parting with my daughter for the first time'.[491] These examples point to the significance of absence in women's travel memoirs. The absence of Patrick has a profound effect on Grant; the absence of Shelley's loved ones shapes her return to Italy; the absence of Gilbert Imlay and partial absence of Fanny and Marguerite bring into sharp focus the change in Wollstonecraft's personal circumstances; and the absence of Stisted's mother anticipates her death later in the narrative.

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[489] Clotilda Elizabeth Stisted, *Letters from the Bye-Ways of Italy*, p. 469.
[490] Ibid., p. 491; Rebecca Butler, *Revisiting Italy: British Women Travel Writers and the Risorgimento (1844-61)* (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 67.
[491] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p. 97.

As such, each travel memoir cited in this section—Grant's *Letters from the Mountains*, Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence*, Stisted's *Bye-ways*, and Shelley's *Rambles*—function as textual monuments to maternal grief. By this I mean that each narrative is informed by personal loss, whether it be explicitly or obliquely referred to. This in turn suggests that maternal suffering is central to their authorial personas. This is somewhat different in Stisted's case as she is a daughter mourning her mother, rather than a mother mourning her child. Even so, each author attempts to reconcile the physical absence of a loved one and the impact that this absence has on them. The next section of this chapter concentrates on Wollstonecraft and Shelley, outlining the ways in which their suffering brings some hope of consolation.

2.1a. Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and Maternal Restoration

Just as there are different types of absence, so too are there different types of suffering. Wollstonecraft was re-energised by the landscape, describing in Letter Eight the 'ineffable pleasure' she gained from viewing the expanse at Tønsberg. Despite this, her memoir ends with the realisation that 'the thoughts, I would fain fly from, lie too close to my heart to be easily shook off'.[492] In her personal correspondence Shelley likewise intimates that the composition of *Rambles* was a painful process. Writing to Leigh Hunt in 1844, she describes it as 'a wretched piece of work' produced 'in a state of pain that makes me look at its pages now as if written in a dream'.[493] Shelley suffered ill health before and during her travels. In 1839, a year before she departed for Paris, Shelley wrote in her 'Journal of Sorrow' that editing Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems had driven her 'to the verge of insanity'.[494] Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow' reveals how memory causes suffering as well as recovery, mirroring her

[492] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, pp. 110, 197.
[493] Mary Shelley, 'To Leigh Hunt', 30 July-August 1844, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, *III*, p. 146.
[494] Mary Shelley, March 1839, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-184, II*, p. 563.

nuanced treatment of Italy as both 'murdress of those I love & of all my happiness' and as 'compensation for these miserable days'.[495] At Cadenabbia in 1840, Shelley quotes a passage from Dante's *Paradiso*, translated as follows: 'As one, who from a dream awaken'd, straight/All he hath seen forgets; yet still retains/Impression of the feeling in his dream'. Below this passage she explains that the 'Essence of Love' is 'carried away beyond this world & its mortal fears hopes & fears, remains brighter, purer, more attractive in the memory, than even the remembrance of the bliss of Pandemian Love, in its dearest form'.[496] These two entries point to the ambiguity of memory in Shelley's life writing. While on the one hand memory inspires 'desolation', on the other it produces 'bliss'. This affective oscillation reflects the journey of suffering and restoration undertaken in *Rambles*. Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's narratives of loss and recovery hark back to the tradition of spiritual autobiography.

Studies of autobiographical writing have ascertained that it arose from earlier forms of spiritual autobiography. Dating to the Early-Modern period, and closely aligned with Puritan conversion narratives, spiritual autobiography follows an individual's transition from damnation to grace. Amy Culley observes that by the Romantic period 'spiritual autobiography was adapted to new purposes', indicating that while its Christian significance was still present, it had 'crossed the borders of secular and religious genres', including the travel memoir.[497] Without overestimating Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's debt to spiritual autobiography too much, there are several comparisons to be made. Firstly, the figure of the suffering traveller can be traced back to the pilgrim of spiritual autobiography. That Wollstonecraft and Shelley arrive at moments of personal revelation and recovery is another echo of spiritual autobiography. This is evidenced in their melancholic responses to

[495] Ibid., May 1824, pp. 476-477.
[496] Ibid., May 1840, pp. 568-569.
[497] Amy Culley, 'Life Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism and Religion*, ed. by Jeffrey W. Barbeau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 217-234 (p. 224).

Scandinavia and Italy respectively. While *A Short Residence* ends with Wollstonecraft admitting that 'I have been wandering round this dirty place, literally speaking, to kill time', *Rambles* ends with Shelley contemplating the terrace at Cocumella, where 'the moon hangs luminous, a pendant sphere of silver fire'.[498] The end of *A Short Residence* and *Rambles* reveal much about Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's experiences of displacement. While Wollstonecraft does not have a stable home to return to, Shelley's 'home' in Italy is restored.

Molly Murray's observation that 'the spiritual autobiographer re-narrates and recuperates the past in order to anticipate an as-yet-unnarrated future' can be mapped on to Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's narratives of suffering and restoration.[499] Although writing in different circumstances, Wollstonecraft and Shelley likewise look towards the future. Contemplating the view in Gothenburg, Wollstonecraft writes that '[w]orldly cares melt into the airy stuff that dreams are made of, and reveries, mild and enchanting as the first hopes of love or the recollection of lost enjoyment, carry the hapless wight into futurity, who in bustling life has vainly strove to throw off the grief which lies heavy at the heart'.[500] Here the landscape facilitates a 'principle of movement' from past to future, mingling loss with hope.[501] Fanny also embodies the past and future, much like Percy Florence in *Rambles*. Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's children become receptacles of memory, by which I mean how their presence triggers memories of the past. The implications of Fanny and Percy Florence as embodiments of past and future is explored in the next section of this chapter.

2.1b. Fanny Imlay and Percy Florence

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[498] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p. 197; Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *II*, p. 296.
[499] Molly Murray, 'The radicalism of Early-Modern spiritual autobiography', in *A History of English Autobiography*, ed. by Adam Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 41-55 (p. 41).
[500] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p. 75.
[501] Mary A. Favret, '*Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*: Traveling with Mary Wollstonecraft', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 209-227 (p. 217).

The absence of figures from Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's lives is compounded by the presence of their children, Fanny and Percy Florence. Fanny was an infant when Wollstonecraft departed for Scandinavia in 1795; Percy Florence was an undergraduate. Despite this difference in age, I argue that both embody Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's past loss and well as an anticipated future. I extend Wolley's articulation of the 'temporal matrix', defined as a 'dynamic interchange between history and memory', by including Fanny and Percy Florence within the remit of memory.[502]

Wollstonecraft and Shelley draw attention to their role as mothers in *A Short Residence* and *Rambles*. This is more than an expression of devoted maternity. In her analysis of *A Short Residence* Elizabeth Zold argues that Fanny 'is used as a contrast for what Wollstonecraft experiences as a travel[l]er', insofar as she 'is the embodiment of home, a familiar constant during their travels'.[503] However, 'home' was a contested topic for Wollstonecraft. At the end of Letter Twenty-Two, Wollstonecraft mentions the 'cruelest [*sic*] of disappointments' she received last spring 'in returning home'.[504] This refers to Wollstonecraft's discovery that Gilbert had taken another mistress upon her return from Paris in 1795. She concludes the letter with a brief meditation on adult and child experience:

> Know you of what materials some hearts are made? I play the child, and weep at the recollection—for the grief is still fresh that stunned as well as wounded me—yet never did drops of anguish like these bedew the cheeks of infantine innocence—and why should they mine, that never was stained by a blush of

[502] Rachel Woolley, 'Reanimating Scenes of History', p. 194.
[503] Elizabeth Zold, 'Motherhood and the Embodied Traveler in Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*', in *Traveling Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Traveling as an Embodied Practice*, ed. by Nicole Maruo-Schröder, Sarah Schäfer-Althaus, and Uta Schaffers (New York: Routledge, 2024), pp. 47-64 (pp. 54-55).
[504] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p. 189.

> guilt? Innocent and credulous as a child, why have I not the same happy thoughtlessness? Adieu![505]

Although Wollstonecraft positions herself as 'a child' in this letter, it is Fanny who provides the contrast in experience overall. By contrast, 'the gaiety of my babe was unmixed; regardless of omens or sentiments, she found a few wild strawberries more grateful than flowers or fancies'.[506] Here Wollstonecraft's emotional burdens are juxtaposed with her daughter's alimentary enjoyment. In another scene, a sleeping Fanny becomes a vehicle for thinking about the past. 'Why fly my thoughts abroad', she asks, 'when everything around me appears at home?' Anticipating 'the cheeks of infantine innocence' in Letter Twenty-Two, Wollstonecraft notes that '[s]ome recollections, attached to the idea of home, mingled with reflections respecting the state of society I had been contemplating that evening, made a tear drop on the rosy cheek I had just kissed'.[507] These passages illustrate the complexity of memory and absence in *A Short Residence*. Even though Baby Fanny is an image of domesticity, she paradoxically disturbs that image by compelling Wollstonecraft's thoughts to 'fly abroad'. In this instance, Fanny's presence triggers thoughts of an absent Gilbert and lack of a stable family unit to return to.

Percy Florence likewise embodies Shelley's past and future. Like Wollstonecraft, Shelley's experience contrasts with her son's. Writing to Claire Clairmont from Rome in 1843, Shelley mentions that he 'took a fancy' to 64 Via Sistina, the former residence of Amelia Curran, who had painted likenesses of the Shelleys, their son William, and Claire in the Summer of 1819 shortly before William's death.[508] She reports that 'though it put me out of spirits at first' she overcame this for Percy Florence's sake.[509] That Shelley describes Rome

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[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid., p. 67.
[507] Ibid., p. 69.
[508] Mary Shelley, 'To Claire Clairmont', 23 March 1843, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, *III*, p. 62.
[509] Ibid.

as ‘a place full of melancholy at once & delight to me’ further demonstrates her nuanced response towards Italy. If, as Betty T. Bennett suggests, Shelley establishes ‘a continuum between that past and the present’, this temporal movement is embodied in Percy Florence.[510] As Shelley’s only surviving child, he is connected to her personal past and future. This line of thought is developed in *Rambles*, which reflects on the past even as it looks towards an unnarrated future.

Shelley’s melancholic response to Rome is repeated upon her arrival in Venice. ‘Gathered into myself’, she writes, ‘I saw those before me long departed; and I was agitated again by emotions—by passions—and those the deepest a woman’s heart can harbour—a dread to see her child even at that instant expire—which then occupied me’.[511] This refers to the death of Clara Shelley in 1818. Although Shelley does not mention Clara’s name—or the cause of her death—her reference to the events of 1818 reinforces the significance of maternal memory and absence in the narrative. Shelley’s fears for her children’s lives extend to Percy Florence. In the first letter of volume one Shelley notes that ‘[m]y son and his two friends have decided on spending their summer vacation on the shores of the lake of Como…They wish me to accompany them, and I gladly consent’.[512] However, the arrival of a small boat for Percy Florence at Como elicits a sombre response:

> This evening P—’s little boat has come; small, indeed, it is. In shape it is something of a sea boat, and it has a keel, and a tiny sail; but it is too small to convey a feeling of safety. I look at it and shudder. I can bring no help, except constant watchfulness; and many an anxious hour it will cause me to pass. Do not call me a grumbler. A tragedy has darkened my life: I endeavour, in vain, to cast

[510] Betty T. Bennett, ‘Mary Shelley’s letters: the public/private self’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 211-225 (p. 220).
[511] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *II*, p. 78.
[512] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p.1.

> aside the fears which are its offspring; they haunt me perpetually, and make too large and too sad a portion of my daily life.
>
> The arrival of the boat, you see, has dashed my spirits, so I break off.—Adieu.[513]

An otherwise mundane object—a boat—is allotted greater significance in the light of Percy Bysshe Shelley's drowning at Lake Como two decades prior. Here maternal and marital loss intertwines, with the loss of a husband 'haunting' the possible loss of a son. In Dolan's summation, Shelley 'moves fluidly, yet painfully, between the living and the dead', a characteristic indicator of 'traumatic experience'.[514] This reinforces her suffering maternal persona insofar as it offers a glimpse into Shelley's relational roles as widow and mother.

A contemporaneous review in *Ainsworth's Magazine* observed that 'The widow of the poet…is a picture full of sad reminiscences, but enlivened in this case by the presence of a son, whose opening career of life…aroused frequent and strong sympathies with the future'.[515] This points to the overlapping personas of Shelley's travel memoir. She is at once the 'sad' widow of Percy Bysshe Shelley and mother to a son whose 'opening career of life' stimulates an optimistic vision of the future. This rhetoric emerges in the 'Journal of Sorrow'. In one entry dated November 1839, Shelley writes that 'Through Percy I enjoy perpetual sunshine—& he spreads a warm glow over my life that, when not ill, penetrates every portion of it'.[516] This is more than an expression of maternal love. Overall, the journal entry is a speculation on the future: Shelley wonders if she may experience 'another hope', concluding the entry with, 'We shall see!'[517] Read in the context of the full journal entry, her remarks

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[513] Ibid., p. 74.
[514] Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering*, p. 134.
[515] [Anonymous], 'Germany and Italy', in *Ainsworth's Magazine: A Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, & Art*, ed. by William Harrison Ainsworth, volume 6 (London: John Mortimer, 1844), p. 216.
[516] Mary Shelley, journal entry for 27 November 1839, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 563.
[517] Ibid., p. 564.

about Percy Florence suggest that her future coalesces around him. Shelley develops this line of thought in *Rambles*, in which Percy Florence embodies Italy's future.

The first volume of *Rambles* opens with Shelley returning to a 'much changed' Italy. Her past familiarity with the country evokes specific memories that furnish her thoughts on Italy's potential future. While the 'new generation' refers to the effort towards Italian unification, it is also an apt description of Percy Florence and his friends:

> Can it, indeed, be true, that I am about to revisit Italy? How many years are gone since I quitted that country! There I left the mortal remains of those beloved—my husband and my children, whose loss changed my whole existence, substituting, for happy peace and the interchange of deep-rooted affections, years of desolate solitude, and a hard struggle with the world; which only now, as my son is growing up, is brightening into a better day. The name of Italy has magic in its very syllables. The hope of seeing it again recalls vividly to my memory that time, when misfortune seemed an empty word, and my habitation on earth a secure abode, which no evil could shake. Graves have opened in my path since then; and, instead of the cheerful voices of the living, I have dwelt among the early tombs of those I loved. Now a new generation has sprung up; and, at the name of Italy, I grow young again in their enjoyments, and gladly prepare to share them.[518]

Shelley here uses memory to anticipate an unnarrated future. Her description of the 'new' Italy echoes her comment in the preface, in which she hopes that 'the new generation may be emancipated by their courage, their knowledge, their virtues'.[519] Although historically '[t]he relationship between Shelley's autobiographical journey in *Rambles* and the Risorgimento

[518] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, I*, pp. 1-2.
[519] Ibid., p. xv.

has nonetheless largely been overlooked in extant scholarship', the text intermingles personal and political commentary.[520] This fusion is created through the use of maternal imagery, where enroute to Italy Shelley 'never remember[s] feeling so intimately how bounteous a mother is fair earth'.[521] The maternal force of Italy complements Shelley's maternal persona. This persona allows Shelley to address the political future of Italy under the guise of a respectable widowed mother. Her descriptions of Italy are in sharp contrast to those of England, which is framed as a 'stepmother'. The juxtaposition between them highlights the significance of memory in *Rambles*, as Italy is associated with both the past and the future.

Entries from the 'Journal of Sorrow' in this period shed light on Shelley's conception of Italy as a mother. During a brief return to London in 1841 Shelley writes several entries despairing of her life in England. Written in Italian and French, these entries align Italy with restoration and England with death. In the former, she laments:

> Here I am! The sky is cloudy, the sun has set—the moon is never bright—every star has disappeared—How changed the scene is—how changed is my heart—what will ever be!
>
> I have lost every friend—Surrounded by wretched people—uncertain about what will happen to my son—hoping for nothing—unhappy—betrayed, alone!
>
> My God—I pray—Save my son—make him worthy of his father—and more happy.
>
> Grant that I may return to Italy—and never more shall see again this country of ungrateful, wretched traitors

[520] Rebecca Butler, *Revisiting Italy*, p. 44.
[521] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I,* p. 12.

> or make me die—O my God I suffer too much—I am scorned too much, bewildered—desperate
>
> And yet I ought to thank god that my son still lives and I do thank him—but the human heart is a weak thing—and guilt is so fatal—and my situation here is so intolerable that I can do no less than lament and pray to god that I may be permitted to return to Italy and leave the stepmother England forever, or die[.][522]

Here Shelley conceives of Italy as her 'true' mother. This rhetoric echoes her elegiac poem 'The Choice' (1823), in which Shelley refers to Italy as 'my adopted land'.[523] In the poem, Italy is positioned as Shelley's home because it is the burial place of Percy Bysshe Shelley, their children, and Allegra Byron. Looking retrospectively, Shelley writes that ''Tis thus the past on which my spirit leans/Makes dearest to my soul Italian scenes'.[524] As Schoina notes, on the one hand 'the country assumes a soothing, almost therapeutic role', but on the other hand it 'looms as an implacable accomplice to the domestic misfortunes and tragic destiny which beset the speaker', as is evidenced in Shelley's description of William's tomb as the 'dark earth', a site of grief and loss.[525] The nuance with which Shelley approaches her return to Italy can be mapped on to her journey in *Rambles*, in which Italy is at once a site of loss and a site of potential restoration. The multiplicity of Shelley's personas—widow, wife of dead children, and mother to a living son—reinforce this suspension between life and death.

The next section of this chapter considers how Shelley uses biblical and classical iconography to reflect on her status as widowed mother. It traces a rhetoric of maternal and

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[522] Mary Shelley, 11 January 1841, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* pp. 570-571.
[523] Ibid., p. 492.
[524] Ibid., p. 493.
[525] Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians'*, p. 58.

marital loss in Shelley's art criticism in *Rambles*. By so doing it highlights the centrality of memorialisation in Shelley's travel memoir.

3.1a. Maternal Monuments

Shelley's use of maternal imagery goes beyond her descriptions of Italy and Percy Florence: it also informs her art criticism. During her travels in Italy Shelley visited several galleries, including the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and the Academia Belle Arti in Venice, where she saw a sculpture of Niobe and artworks of the Madonna. In Greek mythology, Niobe was punished by Leto, who sent Apollo and Artemis to murder her fourteen children as retribution for her hubris. Meanwhile, the Madonna's son was crucified. Building upon Moskal's argument that Shelley appropriates 'the early Victorian roles of widow and mother…with a figural representation that speaks the unspeakable portions of her life in a different language', this section considers how Shelley uses art to reflect on maternal suffering and child loss.[526] Through a comparison with Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Notes on Sculptures' (1819), it explores art as a mediator of maternal memory.

My analysis of Shelley's art criticism extends upon Bruce Haley's articulation of the 'symbolic' energy of Romantic period sculpture. Haley's examination of Chantrey's 'The Sleeping Children', which I discussed briefly in the introductory chapter to this thesis, argues that the monument had such an impact because it was understood as a 'living' form.[527] Indeed, monuments are not merely an ideal form sculpted in marble: rather, they can figuratively 'speak' to the viewer. This is evident in Shelley's descriptions of the Niobe

[526] Jeanne Moskal, 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Art Criticism as Life Writing in Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy*', in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, ed. by Helen M. Buss, D.L. Macdonald and Anne McWhir (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), pp. 189-216 (p. 191).
[527] Bruce Haley, *Living Forms: Romantics and the Monumental Figure* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 114.

monument and portraits of the Virgin Mary in *Rambles*, which become symbolic representations of maternal suffering.

Memory is integral to Shelley's visits to art galleries. In 'The Choice' she had described how William 'Had gazed with infant wonder on the grace/Of stone wrought deities and pictured saints/In Rome's high palaces' before 'Grim death approached'.[528] Writing to Maria Gisborne in 1819, Shelley remarks that 'Our little Will is delighted with the goats and the horses and the men rotti, and the ladie's white marbel [*sic*] feet', a reference to the broken statues in the Vatican.[529] Two decades later, Shelley notes that she 'felt a crowd of associations rise up around me, gifted with painful vitality' when she approached the Uffizi gallery.[530] Shelley had last visited the Uffizi in 1819 between the death of William and the birth of Percy Florence. Writing to Marianne Hunt shortly after Percy Florence was born, Shelley mentions that her husband 'often spends many hours of the day at the gallery admiring & studying the statues & pictures'.[531] The result of Percy Bysshe Shelley's prolonged visits to the Uffizi was 'Notes on Sculptures', written in 1819 but published sporadically between 1832 and 1879. In 1839, the year before she departed for her first trip with Percy Florence, Shelley had published some of the notes in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*. Although Shelley did not revisit the Uffizi until 1843, the proximity between her editorial arrangement of the notes in 1839 and her 1840 trip suggests a confluence with *Rambles*.

One of the longest entries in the 'Notes on Sculptures' is of the Niobe group. The sculpture depicts Niobe sheltering her younger daughter from an unseen danger. This composition was especially popular in the Romantic period. Phillis Wheatley's poem, 'Niobe

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[528] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II*, p. 492.
[529] Mary Shelley, 'To Maria Gisborne', 9 April 1819, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, *I*, p. 93.
[530] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *II,* p. 152.
[531] Mary Shelley, 'To Marianne Hunt', 24-25 November 1819, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, *I*, p. 114.

in Distress for her Children Slain By Apollo' was inspired by Richard Wilson's 1760 painting *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe*. Wheatley describes how the fury of 'Apollo's wrath' results in Niobe 'of all her family bereft/Without husband, son, or daughter left/Grew stupid at the shock'. Although the figures in Wilson's painting are part of a tableau vivant, they are imbued with emotional resonance. Viewers of Wilson's painting (and readers of Wheatley's poem) are encouraged to reflect on and sympathise with Niobe's grief. In his *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1807), Henry Siddons observes that,

> …fixity, or want of motion, is a quality which the aspect of a *rock* impresses more easily on thought than the idea of *silence*—and that a grief, deep and full, such as a mother, so cruelly robbed of her children, ought to represent, should, in fact, be motionless: she is totally plunged in the representation of her afflicting fate; and as the soul fixes (as we may say) with a haggard eye on this solitary idea, the whole body…preserves also a fixed and single attitude.[532]

I mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis that the Boothby and Chantrey monuments resonated with viewers because they were perceived as 'living' forms capable of human expression. Such was the case with Niobe, as Siddons' account implies. The implication is that the Niobe sculpture represents anticipated maternal grief.

In his account of the Niobe in 'Notes on Sculptures', Percy Bysshe Shelley likewise imbues the sculpture with affective resonance. He notes that the child's 'hair is gathered into a knot, probably by that mother whose care will never gather it again'.[533] His description of the child's hair recalls the moment preceding Beatrice Cenci's execution, when

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[532] Henry Siddons, *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action, Adapted to the English Drama. From a Work on the Same Subject by M. Engel, Member of the Royal Academy of Berlin. Embellished with Numerous Engravings, Expressive of the Various Passions, and Representing the Modern Costume of the London Theatres* (London: Richard Phillips, 1807), p. 175.
[533] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Notes on Sculptures*, p. 42.

she asks Lucretia to 'bind up this hair…We shall not do it any more'.[534] Just as Beatrice Cenci is fated to die, so is Niobe's daughter, who embodies 'a sense of the inevitable and rapid destiny which is consummating her'.[535] In this context, the sculpture represents impending grief:

> There is no terror in the countenance [of Niobe]—only grief—deepest grief.—There is no anger—of what avail is indignation against what is known to be omnipotent? There is no selfish shrinking from personal pain; there is no panic at supernatural agency—there is no adverting herself to herself—the calamity is mightier than to leave scope for such emotion.
>
> Everything is swallowed up in sorrow.— Her countenance in assured expectation of the arrow piercing its victim in her embrace, is fixed on her omnipotent enemy. The pathetic beauty of the mere expression of her tender and serene despair, which is yet so profound and so incapable of being ever worn away, is beyond any effect of sculpture.—As soon as the arrow shall have pierced her last child, the fable that she was dissolved into a fountain of tears, will be but a feeble emblem of the sadness of despair, in which the years of her remaining life, we feel, must flow away.[536]

The level of detail provided in the Niobe account—from the child's hair to the arrow—shows that he was particularly moved by this sculpture. Writing to Thomas Jefferson Hogg in 1819, he acknowledges that '[n]o production of sculpture, not even the Apollo, ever produced on me so strong an effect as this Niobe'.[537] Varinelli suggests that the Laocoön and Niobe groups symbolised his experiences and fears of child loss, namely the deaths of William and Clara

[534] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jack Donovan and Cian Duffy (London: Penguin, 2016), pp. 355-356 (lns. 160-164).
[535] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Notes on Sculptures in Rome*, p. 42.
[536] Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[537] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To Thomas Jefferson Hogg', *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, *II*, 3 vols, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 186.

and the impending birth of Percy Florence.[538] Read in this context, Mary Shelley is identified with Niobe. Although Shelley does not explicitly identify herself as Niobe, her comment to Marianne Hunt that Italy 'has destroyed my two children' gains additional poignancy in the context of Percy Bysshe Shelley's commentary.[539] Two decades later, when the widowed Shelley entered the 'stately chamber, dedicated to the Niobe and her children, whose maternal, remediless grief sheds a solemn sadness around', the Uffizi is associated with both marital as well as maternal loss.[540]

Shelley echoes her husband's account of the Niobe in her commentary on 'an unfinished Virgin and Child', originally attributed to Leonardo da Vinci but now thought to be a copy by one of his pupils.[541] The painting depicts the Virgin Mary looking on at her son as he plays with a lamb. Shelley's description of 'the chaste and fond mother, lovely in youth and innocence, thoughtful from mingled awe and love, with a touch of fear, springing from the tragical destiny of the divine infant, whose days of childhood she watched over and made glad' recalls Percy Bysshe Shelley's recognition of the child's 'rapid destiny' in his note on the Niobe group.[542] This places *Rambles* in indirect conversation with 'Notes on Sculptures' insofar as both are shadowed by parental loss. This is further evidenced in Shelley's attempt to 'try in some degree to convey the impression they made, so as to introduce you to sympathise in my feelings with regard to them'.[543] Art's capacity to express human feeling influences Shelley's response to compositions of the Virgin Mary and Christ.

The Virgin Mary held a significant position in the nineteenth century public consciousness. According to Carol Engelhardt-Herringer, interest in the Virgin Mary was

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[538] Valentina Varinelli, 'Shelley on Fatherhood: The Genesis and Substance of his 'Notes on Sculptures'', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 70 (2021), 63-85 (p. 76).
[539] Mary Shelley, 'To Marianne Hunt', 29 June 1819, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, *I*, p. 101.
[540] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 155.
[541] Ibid., p. 110.
[542] Ibid.
[543] Ibid.

stimulated in part by the emergence of the Oxford Movement from the 1830s, which promoted the reintroduction of Catholic ritual within the Church of England.[544] Maureen McCue notes that many English travellers subordinated the original religious meaning of Catholic art so that they could 'more comfortably claim Italian art's cultural significance'.[545] This suggests that the iconography of the Virgin Mary could be adapted to suit individual agendas. Although Shelley recognised the difference of 'the mind of a Catholic', as Jane Stabler points out, she was attracted to 'the loveliness of the forms'.[546] In this way Shelley harks back to Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Notes on Sculptures' insofar as both focus on the monumentalization of human feeling identified by Haley. One of her favourite paintings depicts the Virgin Mary and angels kneeling beside the infant Christ. Even though the painting remains unidentified, it evidently resonated with Shelley, who notes that 'I take more pleasure in graceful lines, and attitudes, and expression, than in colouring'.[547] While Shelley mentions the technical 'faults' she found in some of the artworks she describes in *Rambles*, this is subordinated by the figures that make up the compositions.[548] The attention that Shelley gives to the Virgin Mary in particular indicates an iconographic of maternal loss.

The two figures associated with loss in Mariology are the *Mater dolorosa* and the *Pietà*. According to Anna Jameson, with whom Shelley had become acquainted in the 1830s, the *Mater dolorosa* is

> …the mother of the crucified Redeemer; the mother of the atoning Sacrifice; the queen of martyrs; the woman whose bosom was pierced with a sharp sword; through whose sorrow the world was saved, whose anguish was our

[544] Carl Engelhardt-Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary: Religion and Gender in England, 1830-85* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 2.
[545] Maureen McCue, *British Romanticism and the Reception of Italian Old Master Art, 1793-1840* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 48.
[546] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *II*, p. 222; Jane Stabler, 'Sacred Art and Profane Poets', in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, ed. by Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 207-223 (p. 216).
[547] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 222.
[548] Ibid., p. 236.

> joy, and to whom the Catholic Christians address their prayers as consoler of the afflicted, because she had herself tasted of the bitterest of all earthly sorrow, the pang of the agonised mother for the loss of her child.[549]

Jameson's summary here points to the different facets of the Virgin Mary. While she represents agonised grief at the death of her son, she also represents 'joy' and the possibility of spiritual rebirth. Julia Kristeva comes to a similar conclusion in her essay *Stabat Mater* (1977), which explores the symbolic potential of the 'Maternal' in Christianity. For her, the Madonna's suffering at the death of Jesus 'has nothing of tragic excess about it: joy and indeed a kind of triumph supplant her tears, as if the conviction that death does not exist were an unreasonable but unshakeable maternal certainty, upon which the principle of resurrection must have rested on for support'.[550] By this she means that the Virgin Mary at once invokes and evades death. In the context of *Rambles*, the Madonna's dual significance as a grieving mother and a woman who overcomes death reflects Shelley's widowed maternal persona.

During her continental tour Shelley saw paintings of the Virgin Mary 'bearing the Infant God in her arms', 'bent over the babe, while the shepherds veil their eyes with their hands from the dazzling effulgence', and 'kneeling beside the divine infant'.[551] She was particularly drawn to Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Adorazione dei Magi degli Innocenti* ('Adoration of the Magi for the Innocents'). The painting depicts the three wise men's visit to the Virgin Mary and her baby: kneeling beside St. John the Baptist and Joseph are two children who represent the Murder of the Innocents in the New Testament. On this specific element of the painting Shelley writes that '[t]he attitude of these babes, especially of one, has that inexpressible charm of innocence which words cannot convey, and which since the

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[549] Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852), pp. 37-38.
[550] Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 133-152 (p. 144).
[551] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *I*, p. 236, p. 244; *II*, p. 154.

creation of man, the pencil has seldom been able to depict'.[552] This suggests that Shelley found in art a medium through which she could express the 'inexpressible'. Moskal argues that the *Adorazione* reflects Shelley's guilt concerning the suicide of Harriet Westbrook. In her view, the atonement of the Innocents provides a duplicate of Shelley's 'atonement' (the deaths of William and Clara) as justice for Harriet's death.[553] While Shelley mourned 'Poor Harriet to whose sad fate I attribute so many of my own heavy sorrows as the atonement claimed by fate for her death', I am not convinced that this influenced her response to the *Adorazione*.[554] Rather, I would suggest that the Virgin Mary provided an iconographic example of grieving maternity that could be adapted to Shelley's personal circumstances as a widowed mother.[555]

As well as the *Mater dolorosa*, Shelley identifies—and is identified with—the *Pietà*, a composition in which the Virgin Mary cradles the dead body of Christ. In Venice, Shelley saw Titian's *Pietà*. Although she 'was told that I ought not to admire it; yet I could not help doing so: there was something impressive in the mingled awe and terror in Mary's face, when she found the body of Jesus gone'.[556] There are various signifiers of the Resurrection in Titian's *Pietà*. In the dome directly above Jesus is a mosaic of a pelican, a symbol of resurrection in Christian art. Furthermore, to the right of St. Jerome stands a statue of Sibyl, who prophesised the death and Resurrection of Christ.[557] The *Pietà*'s simultaneous acknowledgement of the death of Christ and his future Resurrection provides an iconographic duplicate of Shelley's narrative of loss and restoration in *Rambles*. That Shelley continued to be identified with the *Pietà* after her death in 1852 points to its symbolic importance in the construction of her persona.

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[552] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, *II*, p. 143.
[553] Jeanne Moskal, 'Art Criticism as Life Writing', p. 207.
[554] Mary Shelley, 12 February 1839, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844, II,* p. 560.
[555] See Jeanne Moskal, 'Art Criticism as Life Writing', p. 191; Rebecca Butler, *Revisiting Italy*, p. 49.
[556] Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, II, pp. 89-90.
[557] Bruce Cole, *Titian and Venetian Painting, 1450-1590* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), p. 212.

The Shelley Memorial at Christchurch Priory in Dorset sheds further light on Shelley's identification as *Pietà*. Commissioned by Percy Florence and Jane, Lady Shelley in 1853, the memorial depicts a weeping Shelley cradling Percy Bysshe Shelley's drowned corpse in a composition reminiscent of Michelangelo's Florentine *Pietà*. That Shelley is depicted as *Pietà* suggests that she is a grieving mother; yet the body she holds is not of her child, but of her husband. Though nineteenth century Mariology often conflated the Virgin Mary with her son, therefore imbuing her with divine significance, Shelley's identification as *Pietà* conflates husband and son. This reinforces the overlapping personas that Shelley adopted in the years following Percy Bysshe Shelley's death in 1822, as *Ainsworth's Magazine* had recognised in its review of *Rambles*.

Shelley's art criticism provides further evidence of her interest in narratives of maternal loss. Although Shelley's account of Niobe is brief, it stresses how art is an expression of human feeling. In this she harks back to Percy Bysshe Shelley's accounts of parents and children in the 'Notes on Sculptures', several of which detail art's monumentilzation of grief. Shelley's attraction to the Virgin Mary and Christ is more pronounced. Her identification with and as *Mater dolorosa* and *Pietà* in the years following Percy Bysshe Shelley's death reflects her persona as a widowed mother. It also implicitly positions her as a survivor, insofar as she has witnessed the deaths of a husband and children.

Chapter Conclusion

Memory is integral to *Rambles*, in which Italy inspires solemn reflections on the past and rouses optimistic visions of the future. Shelley simultaneously commemorates the absent presences of Percy Bysshe Shelley and their children even as she looks towards a future with Percy Florence. In so doing Shelley establishes a connection between the past, present, and future. Intermingling memories of her past with scenes of her present with Percy Florence,

Shelley draws attention to her role as a widowed mother. An exploration of Shelley's post-1822 life writing revealed the thematic overlaps that *Rambles* shares with the 'Journal of Sorrow', the 1839 *Poetical Works* and French *Lives*. In so doing this chapter traced a persistent rhetoric of absence and maternal loss in Shelley's post-1822 life writing. Reading *Rambles* in consultation with Shelley's auto/biographical projects offers a new insight into the function of memorialisation in her writing. Through a comparison with Wollstonecraft's abandoned lover, Smith's and Wordsworth's grieving mothers, and Stisted's grieving daughter, this chapter highlighted the centrality of suffering and restoration in *Rambles*.

This chapter also found thematic overlaps with Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Notes on Sculptures', a text likewise interested in parent-child compositions. This language of suffering maternity infiltrates different elements of Shelley's travel memoir, such as her art criticism. By analysing Shelley's accounts of Italian Renaissance art—namely, mother-child compositions of the Virgin Mary and Christ—this chapter demonstrated how Shelley used different iconographies and mediums to explore themes of absence and grief.

Conclusion

In the Bodleian Library is a box of undated sketches by Jane, Lady Shelley, Mary Shelley's daughter-in-law. Jane was the literary executor of the Shelley estate and curated the family's legacy, most notably in the *Shelley Memorials* (1859), a family memoir which refashions Percy Bysshe Shelley for a Victorian reading public. The curious sketches in the Bodleian (see figure 8) are examples of Jane's automatic writing, a process in which an individual receives messages from a departed spirit while in a disassociated state.[558] Jane used automatic writing to gain approval for her biographical endeavors from the deceased Mary Shelley. Just as Shelley attempted to bridge the gap between the living and the dead in her essay 'On Ghosts' and 'Journal of Sorrow', so too did Jane use textual relics to reconstitute the presence of an absent loved one.

Jane's spiritualist tendencies hint at an enduring cultural interest in the absent presence. Although Shelley was physically absent, her presence is still felt in the doodles and words that Jane scribbled upon the page. On one page, Jane has drawn a figure of a young woman (presumably Shelley); on another, she has written, 'my own girl—may you be guarded—MWS'. Other pages are filled with the names of additional departed spirits, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Edward Williams, and Charles Robert St. John, Jane's first husband (see figure 8). This cacophony of spirits associated with Shelley's and Jane's past indicates a sense of belonging with the dead. As the spirit of Shelley allegedly tells Jane, 'I charitably wait for our meeting again'.[559] In this way, automatic writing offers the possibility of a reunion between the living and the dead. The textual aspects of Jane's spiritualism (the

[558] Jane, Lady Shelley, 'Manuscript?' [automatic writing], 18-29 May, n.y.. The Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford (MS. Abinger c. 83, fols. 51-68).
[559] Ibid.

automatic writing and sketches) suggests that the medium of writing is integral to communicating with the dead.

Jane's automatic writing is part of her wider interest in maternal memorialisation. For, while Jane's curation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's posthumous reputation has been widely discussed, she was also deeply engaged in securing Mary Shelley's memory. The American author Helen Moore corresponded with Jane on the possibility of writing Shelley's biography. In a previously unpublished letter dated 1885, Jane tells Moore:

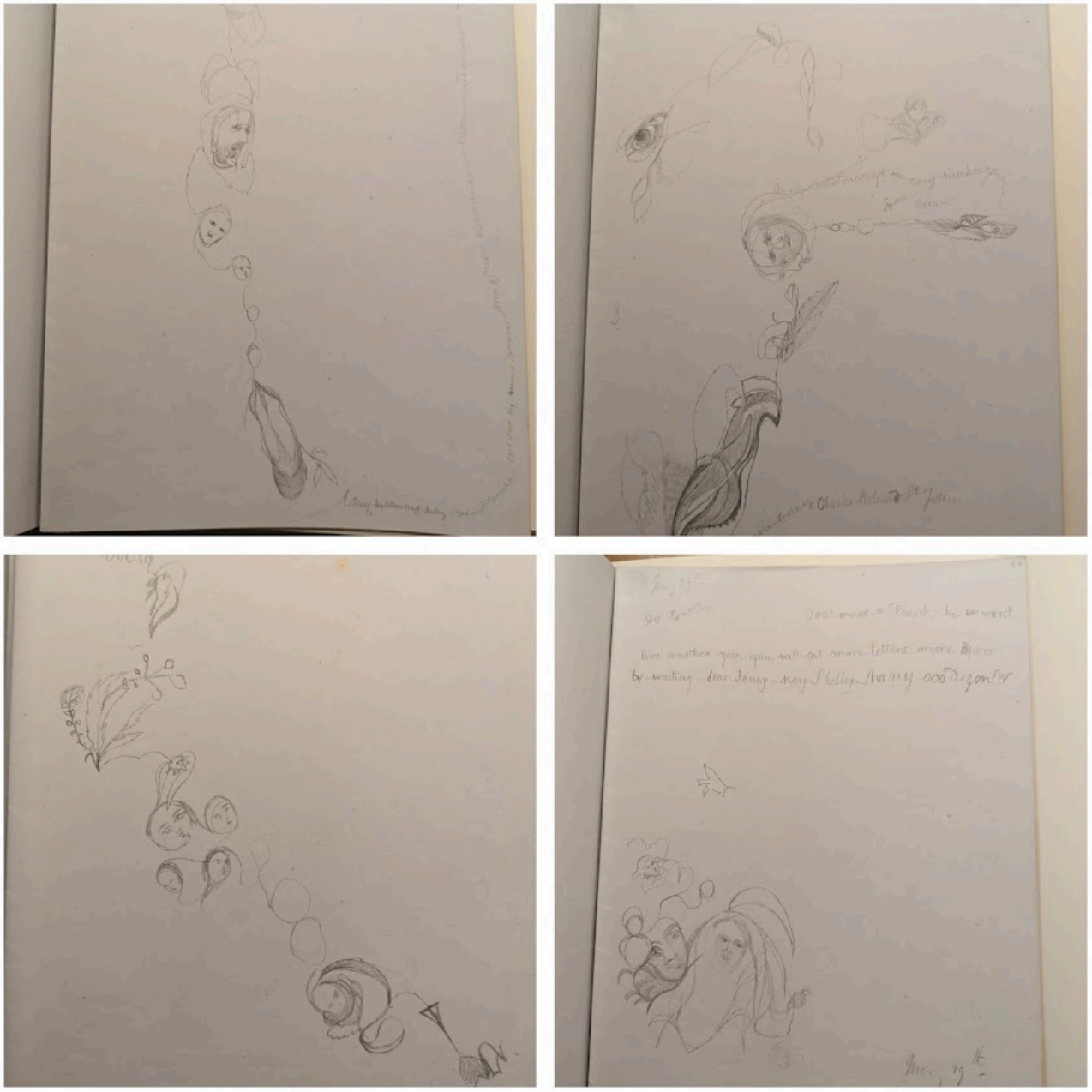
> I believe a life of Mrs Shelley will appear in another year—by one who did not know her personally—but who had had an opportunity of seeing her papers. I knew her myself better than any one unless it was her husband or her son for we never parted from the day of my marriage till that of her death nearly three years of daily, hourly intercourse. She was the most tender, gentle & noble woman who ever trod this earth.—lovely in mind & person ~~& under her influence~~ with no thought of self—I have no words to say how dear & sacred her memory is to me, nor how great a privilege it has been to know one so true & pure & good[.][560]

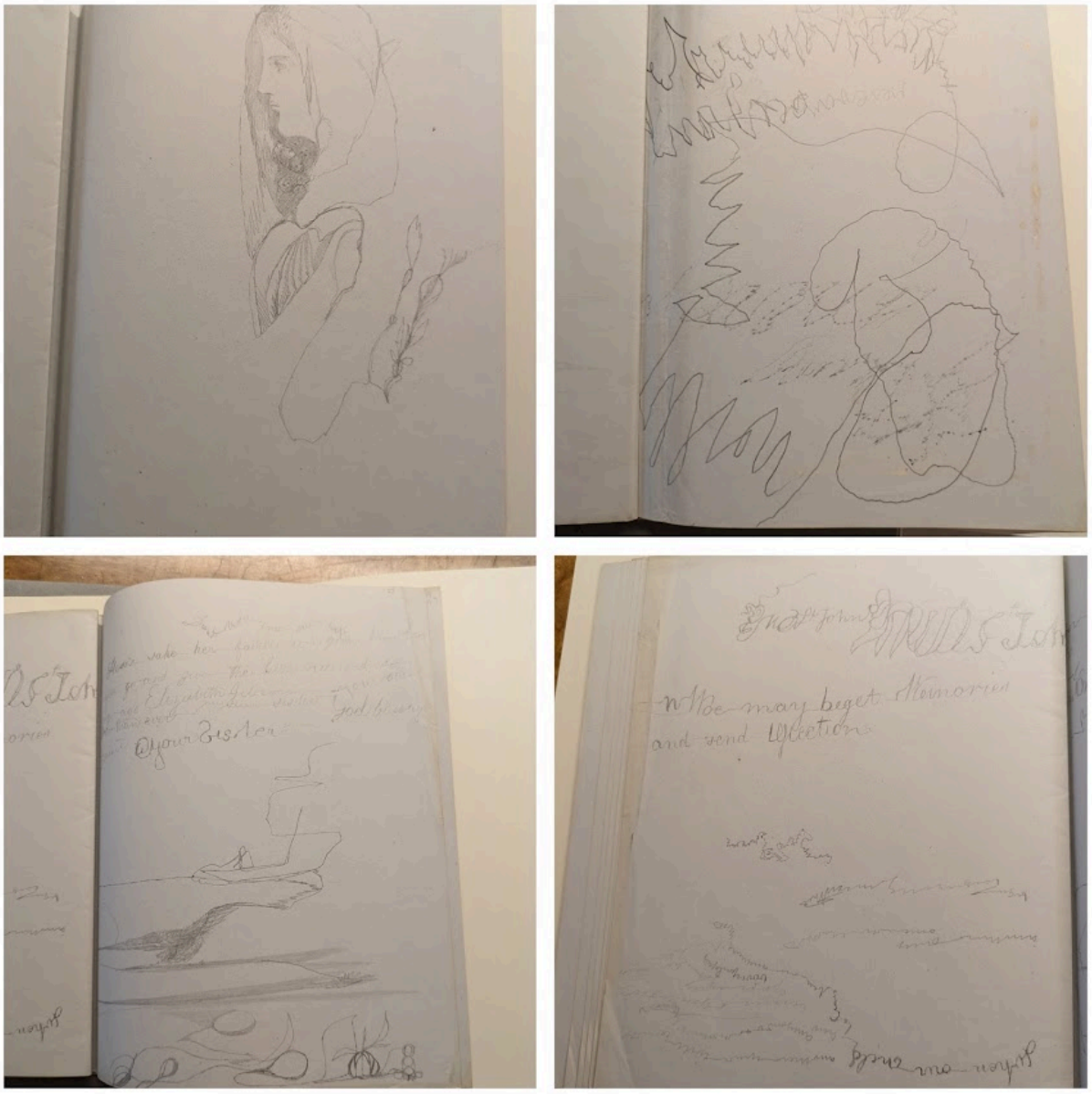
Jane's description of her relationship with Shelley signals her authority in granting a biography: aside from Percy Bysshe Shelley (now deceased) and Percy Florence, Jane knew Shelley best. This letter also locates Shelley as a maternal ideal, who was 'gentle & noble', 'lovely in mind & person', and 'true & pure & good'. Just as Shelley had idealised Wollstonecraft in her correspondence with friends, so too does Jane deify Shelley. Hence Jane's reminiscences about Shelley repeat the cycle of maternal memorialisation that emerged in Shelley's letters about Wollstonecraft.

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[560] Jane, Lady Shelley, 'To Helen Moore', c. August 1885, the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. (MS Abinger c. 73 119-20).

Figure 8: Images of Jane, Lady Shelley's Automatic Writing (n.d.) The Bodleian Library (MS *MS. Abinger c. 83, fols. 51-68). Author's own photos.*





Relics associated with the Godwin-Shelley family were held at Jane and Percy Florence's home at Boscombe Manor. Jane's boudoir has since become known as the 'Shelley Sanctum'.[561] Select visitors could see Mary Shelley's hand mirror, Wollstonecraft's amethyst ring, hair, fragments of bone, and love letters.[562] Emily Sunstein notes that Shelley left a packet of Wollstonecraft's hair to her son and daughter-in-law, on which she wrote, 'My mother's Hair/for Percy & Jane to respect'. Percy Florence and Jane also cut some of

[561] See Bysshe Inigo Coffey, *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermitted Song* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 3-4.
[562] Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws*, pp. 543-544.

Shelley's hair, labelling it as 'Our beloved Madre's hair Feby 1st 1851', the day of Shelley's death.[563] As I highlighted in the introductory chapter to this thesis, it was a common practice to preserve material relics associated with the deceased in the nineteenth century. Jane's preservation of the Shelley relics is part of her wider project of family memorialisation. Just as the *Shelley Memorials* preserve an image of Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley, so too does the Boscombe shrine preserve their memory through material objects like hair and jewellery. Boscombe's collection of Shelley relics gains additional significance in the light of Jane's interest in spiritualism, which located the tangible presence of the dead in specific objects. As Deborah Lutz observes:

> Spiritualism deepened the already strong love the Victorians had for shrines and pilgrimages. Believing that spirits might float around or return to the spaces associated with their living and dying selves meant that in such places—and in the thingness of them—might be found their presence. Such beliefs fed a cherishing of relics and souvenirs, and relic lovers were the most likely ones to take up Spiritualism.[564]

Jane's curation of the Shelley family legacy should therefore be understood within this wider context. If, as Julian North suggests in her analysis of the *Posthumous Poems*, Mary Shelley understood biography as a 'physical reconstitution of the presence of the dead', Jane's curation of the Shelley family legacy is produced to that same end. Samantha Matthews' observation that 'literary remains' were 'not purely verbal and impersonal, but biographical, spiritual, affective', applies here.[565] By this Matthews means that there is a link between a dead author's corpse and their corpus. The presence of Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley (as well as other family members) is evoked not only through their works, but also their

[563] Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 384.
[564] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death*, pp. 123-124.
[565] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains*, p. 3.

corporeal remains and belongings. Hence Jane's continuation of Shelley's attempt to reconstitute the dead through writing is symptomatic of a wider cultural trend of preservation in the nineteenth century.

The Coleridge family also curated family relics. As I highlighted in the introductory chapter, the Coleridge family archive contains a large collection of hair, with locks belonging to Sara and Henry Nelson Coleridge, Herbert and Hartley Coleridge, and Robert Southey, among others. Coleridge's nephew Ernest Hartley Coleridge was foremost among the family curators. As well as producing biographies and edited editions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's letters, he also kept a portrait book containing prints and photographic reproductions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's likenesses. Ernest Hartley corresponded with his cousin Edith asking for advice about the arrangement of their grandfather's papers. Indeed, Edith was interested in the family relics too. She authored one manuscript titled 'Recollections of Henry Nelson Coleridge and his Family, by his Daughter' (1910), in which she reminiscences about her late parents and the education she received from Sarah Fricker, who 'taught me needlework' and 'the multiplication table by heart'.[566] This indicates that Fricker's tutelage of the children at Greta Hall in the first few decades of the nineteenth century continued into Edith's adolescence.

Like Jane, Edith perpetuated a cycle of maternal memorialisation. A manuscript dated circa 1853 labelled in the archive as a 'Chronology of events in the Henry Nelson Coleridge family' lists events that Edith considered to be significant, such as births, deaths, and childhood visits to the seaside. The year 1852 is marked as follows:

> 1852 Dearest mother's departure. May 3rd. Stayed at St. Mark's [Derwent Coleridge's residence in Chelsea] till July 11th. Ju. 19th to Devonshire. return

[566] Edith Coleridge, 'Some Recollections of Henry Nelson Coleridge and his Family, by his Daughter', 1910. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0856, container 1.1).

> Nov. 12th. ^Putney.^ Pattesons stay with in Dec. Norwood. Hackney. Xmas at St. Marks.[567]

Edith's brief chronology echoes the journalistic and autobiographical practices of her mother. Like Coleridge, Edith was interested in her personal family history: the chronology lists the births and baptisms of Herbert and Edith, as well as the deaths of the twins, Bertha Fanny, Henry Nelson Coleridge, and Sarah Fricker Coleridge. 1835, the year Coleridge was taken ill at Ilchester, remains blank. This sequential organization of family events is a form of memorialisation insofar as Edith creates a narrative of family memory. By this I mean that the chronology records and reflects on the lives and loss of family members. The existence of the 'Recollections of Henry Nelson Coleridge and his Family' and the 'Chronology of Events in the Nelson Coleridge Family' point to Edith's sincere interest in family biography and memorialization, which has gone unnoticed by Coleridge family biographers.

After Coleridge's early death, the American Professor Henry Reed wrote an obituary titled 'The Daughter of Coleridge'. It was originally published in *The Literary World* in August 1852.[568] Emily Trevenen copied this obituary and gifted it to Edith, with an inscription that reads, 'Edith Coleridge/copied for her in affec^{te} feeling towards her mother & herself by E.T./Oct 2 1854'.[569] The obituary praises the 'harmony' between Coleridge's 'intellectual powers' and 'feminine delicacy', a representation that also emerges in Edith's *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge* (1873).[570] This memoir was based on an unfinished autobiography Coleridge had started to write shortly before her death. Edith presents her

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[567] Edith Coleridge, 'Chronology of Events in the Henry Nelson Coleridge Family', c. 1853. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0856, container 1.8).
[568] Henry Reed, 'The Daughter of Coleridge', in *The Literary World, Volume XI* (New York: E.A. & G.L. Duyckinck, 1852), pp. 115-118.
[569] Henry Reed, 'The Daughter of Coleridge', copied by Emily Trevenen, 2 October 1854. Harry Ransom Center (MS-0856, container 1.11).
[570] Henry Reed, 'The Daughter of Coleridge', in *The Literary World,* p. 115.

mother as a religious thinker, selecting letters about theology, education, and the upbringing of children. This is suggested in Coleridge's opening address to Edith:

> September 8, 1851.
>
> My dearest Edith,
>
> I have long wished to give you a little sketch of my life. I once intended to have given it with much particularity, but now *time presses*. My horizon has contracted of late. I must content myself with a brief compendium.[571]

Coleridge's incomplete autobiography functions as a 'mother's legacy', a genre that I explored in Chapter One. Sensing her own death, Coleridge wrote the autobiography to reflect on her past. These episodes from Coleridge's life are peppered with a 'chief moral or Reflection suggested by each—some maxim which each portion it specially illustrated, or truth which it exemplified, or warning which it suggested'.[572] The implication is that the autobiography would act as a textual substitute for Coleridge's physical presence. Edith would be able to return to her mother's words long after she had died. On one level, then, the autobiography serves as a textual relic from mother to daughter; at the same time, Edith's arrangement and editing of her mother's papers implies that it also functions as a textual memorial to Sara Coleridge.

[571] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, p. 1.
[572] Ibid.

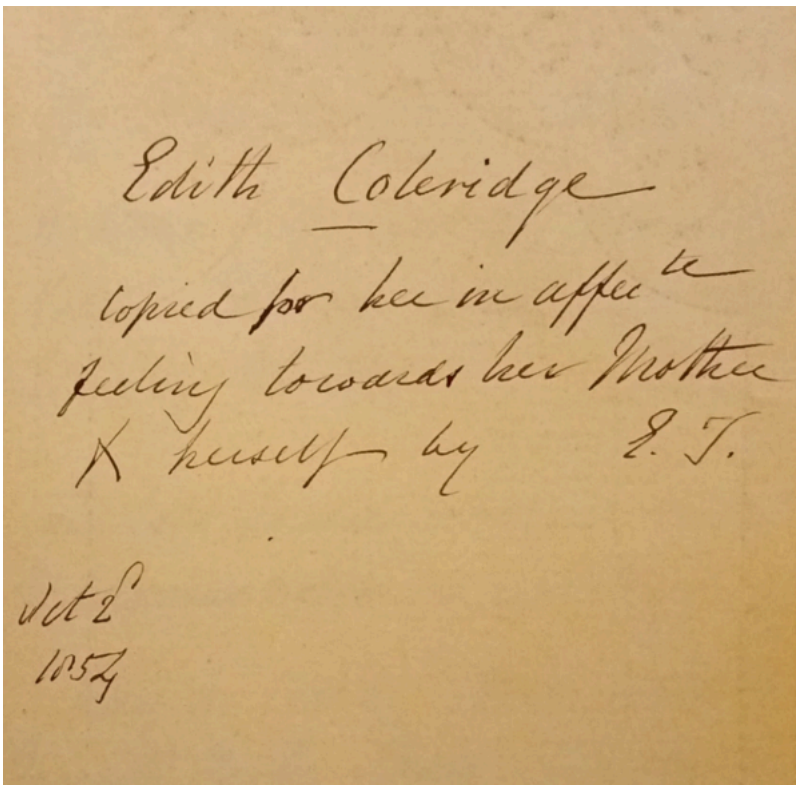


Figure 9: Emily Trevenen's inscription in her handwritten gifted copy of Professor Henry Reed's obituary to Sara Coleridge (1854).

In the immediate aftermath of Coleridge's passing, Edith commemorated her mother in verse form. The Wordsworth Trust holds a manuscript of the poem, 'The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, Tis past'. The original poem was written by George Beaumont, who sent it in a letter to Wordsworth after the death of Beaumont's mother in 1814.[573] That Edith copied this poem suggests that it was circulated amongst the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle. As Samantha Matthews observes, the Coleridges were a 'papery' family: they shared poems and albums with one another, as well as extended family members and friends, such as the Wordsworths and Southeys.[574] This exchange of manuscripts was particularly endemic among the women in the family, as Edith's copy of Beaumont's dirge suggests. Here is the poem in full:

The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past.

[573] George Beaumont, 'To William Wordsworth', 20 November 1814, in *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family, 1803-1829: With a Study of the Creative Exchange Between Wordsworth and Beaumont*, ed. By Jessica Fay (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 131-133.
[574] Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 207.

That gentle sigh, dear mother, was thy last

and now diffused among the blest above

glows the pure spirit of maternal love;

Tinged by whose beams my very failings shone

Graced in thy eyes with something not their own

no more affection shall thy fancy cheat;

Or warp thy judgement, when again we meet;

But every action in its native hue

Rise undisguised, and open to thy view.

May every action then, be duly weighed,

Each virtue cherished, & each duty paid;

That when my trembling Soul shall wing her flight

Thro 'deaths' dark valley to the realms of light,

I may expect where no false views beguile

The approving look, and that accustom'd smile.

Blest smile! becoming her sublime abode,

And harbinger of pardon from my God.[575]

[575] Edith Coleridge, 'The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past', 1852. The Jerwood Centre at the Wordsworth Trust (WLMS A/ Coleridge, Edith/1 1991.76.2).

As I argued in Chapter One, Coleridge's transcription of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's poems on child loss gain additional poignancy in the wake of Fricker Coleridge's death: what was initially an elegy to a dead child became an elegy to a dead mother. Beaumont's poem likewise speaks for more than one death. The 'dreaded hour tis come' works for the deaths of two mothers: Rachel Howland (Beaumont's mother) and Sara Coleridge. This in turn points to the shared resonances of maternal death. The poem is a maternal monument, with Edith applying Beaumont's identification of Rachel as 'the pure spirit of maternal love' to Coleridge.

The examples of Jane and Edith point to the ways in which issues of memorialisation and legacy continue and evolve within the Shelley and Coleridge families. Coleridge's and Shelley's substantial contributions to family memoirs between the 1820s and 1850s should not be read in isolation; rather, they are symptomatic of a broader interest in memorialisation. Friends and family members remained present in material objects like hair and teeth, as well as their letters, biographies, and works. Coleridge commemorated her husband and mother in the 'Book of Mourning', as well as in poems and published editions of her father's work. Shelley's *Rambles* likewise presents an image of a widowed mother coming to terms with her past losses. This range in genre reflects the multiplicity of absence.

In its analysis of literature, correspondence, and diaries, this thesis has highlighted different mother-child relationships. I read Coleridge and Shelley as both daughters and mothers. In so doing this thesis sought to illustrate the intergenerational significance of loss. Shelley's reading of Wollstonecraft had a profound impact on her life and work, as did Fricker's presence in the Nelson Coleridge household. Coleridge and Shelley were mothers themselves who wrote extensively about their children. Both too experienced numerous child losses. I have argued throughout this thesis that Coleridge's 1830s poems and *Phantasmion*, as well as Shelley's *Proserpine*, *Maurice*, and *Rambles* were informed by their personal

experience of loss. Jane and Edith continue and develop this intergenerational project in their commemorations of Mary Shelley and Sara Coleridge, which identify both women as a maternal ideal.

Chapter 1 uncovered Coleridge's maternal guilt through an analysis of self-mourning in her 1830s poems to and for children. I argued that Coleridge uses a rhetoric of self-mourning—by which I mean she positions herself as dying—to interrogate the bond between mother and child. Unable to perform 'a Mother's part', Coleridge welcomes death, a choice that will necessarily separate her from her children. This chapter considered other examples of maternal (self-)mourning. It drew comparisons between Coleridge's 1830s poems and 'mother's legacies', a genre dated to the Early-Modern period in which a dead or dying mother transmits guidance to her children from beyond the grave. Furthermore, a brief outline of maternal elegies highlighted the prevalence of resignation in poems about loss. The final section of this chapter explored the idea of interpersonal mourning. Through a comparative analysis with Fricker's 1790s poems on child loss and Henry Nelson Coleridge's dirges on the deaths of Berkeley and Florence, I argued that the manuscript history of 'Verses written in sickness' shows that a poem can speak for more than one death.

Chapter 2 developed this notion of intergenerational mourning in its exploration of maternal absence in *Phantasmion*. It argued that Coleridge uses putrefaction as a means of thinking about loss. In other words, *Phantasmion* is interested in the possibility that the dead remain present in another form. This chapter used three episodes from *Phantasmion* as evidence of Coleridge's interest in absent presences. Though Phantasmion's mother dies suddenly in the second chapter, she returns in spirit form later in the novel; and Princess Iarine's mother is presumed dead for most of the narrative until it is revealed that she had been stranded on a desert island, where she dies shortly after reuniting with her daughter. This chapter also examined the character of Princess Iarine, who teaches her younger brother,

Albinet, about death. To support my argument, I used hitherto unpublished excerpts from Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning', specifically about the deaths of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker. I suggested that the 'Book of Mourning' demonstrates Coleridge's belief in the immateriality of the soul versus the perishable materiality of cadavers, insofar as the bodies of Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker are described as 'clay'. This in turn reinforces the idea of the absent presence, for the spirit of a human lingers after their body has decomposed.

Chapter 3 read Shelley's *Proserpine* and *Maurice* as narratives of child absence. It argued that the recovery of a lost child is made possible through the act of storytelling. Maurice's father inadvertently locates his son after piecing together information from other characters; and Ceres finds her daughter after listening to Arethusa's story. I suggested that storytelling is intergenerational insofar as it facilitates an affective reunion between parent and child. This chapter also considered other forms of childlessness. Dame Smithson, who kidnaps Maurice when he is a baby, provides a counter example to Ceres and the Traveller as she does not have children of her own. These different forms of childlessness allow Shelley to explore familial absence and to ultimately privilege the bond between parents and children. *Proserpine* and *Maurice* are therefore interested not only in the lost child but also the parents that lose them.

Chapter 4 explored a different type of loss by looking at Shelley as a widowed mother. Through a comparative analysis with the 'Journal of Sorrow', this chapter argued that *Rambles* is a narrative of loss and restoration. Shelley reflects on the loss of her husband and children even as she looks forward to her future with Percy Florence. This chapter identified different forms of maternal loss in Shelley's travel memoir. I suggested that the sculpture of Niobe and various artworks of the Virgin Mary that Shelley saw during her travels provided an iconographic example of child loss. This chapter highlighted intergenerational bonds in its

discussion of Shelley's relationship with Percy Florence, as well as Wollstonecraft's relationships with Shelley and Fanny Imlay. By so doing it shed light on different forms of maternal and child absence.

This thesis has traced a consistent rhetoric of maternal and child loss in Coleridge's and Shelley's writings from 1820 to 1852. In so doing it has drawn comparisons between Coleridge's and Shelley's treatment of motherhood. There are different forms of loss in Coleridge's and Shelley's writings: While I viewed Coleridge's works through the lens of maternal absence, I read Shelley through the lens of child absence. Reading Coleridge's and Shelley's work through the lens of intergenerational loss revealed the ways in which they wrote both from the perspective of mothers and daughters. This thesis situated Coleridge's and Shelley's works within the context of the serial losses they experienced. In so doing this thesis demonstrated how Coleridge's and Shelley's representations of maternity frequently coalesced around loss. The thematics of loss was culturally significant in the Romantic period. It allowed individuals like Coleridge and Shelley to ponder the nature of death and loss. In addition, the absent presence permeated literary culture at this time. Absent loved ones were conceived to be present in another sphere of existence: while this was largely determined by a theological understanding of death, this belief in an incorporeal presence also emerged in secular writing, such as Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow'. This hints at a shared language of loss, absence, and memorialisation.

Appendices

The appendices contains full transcriptions of manuscripts quoted in this thesis. It is divided into two sections: Appendix 1 is for the Coleridge family papers and Appendix 2 is for the Godwin-Shelley family papers. A brief overview of the contents of each manuscript is attached to the transcription. MS locations and call numbers are also provided.

Appendix 1. Letters

1.1 Sarah Fricker Coleridge Letters

Below are transcriptions of correspondence by and related to Sarah Fricker Coleridge. These date from 1799 to 1845.

Sarah Fricker Coleridge to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 25 March 1799

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3)

This letter was written shortly after the death of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's infant son Berkeley, who died of complications from a smallpox vaccine in February 1799. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was absent in Germany at the time. Upon the advice of Thomas Poole, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was not informed of his son's death until a month later. In the letter, Fricker Coleridge movingly describes the days leading up to Berkeley's death. She was deeply affected by the event, telling her husband that 'this parting was the severest trial that I have ever yet undergone and I pray to God that I may never live to behold the death of another child'. She asks Samuel Taylor Coleridge to return (he did not return to England until

July). Fricker Coleridge ends her letter with news about her sister Eliza's flirtation with an American captain and Wordsworth's poems.

My dearest Love

I hope you will not attribute my long silence to want of affection, if you have received Mr Poole's letter you will know the reason and acquit me. My darling infant left his wretched mother on the tenth of February, and tho the leisure that followed was intolerable to me, yet I could not employ myself in reading or writing, or in any way that prevented my thoughts from resting on him – this parting was the severest trial that I have ever yet undergone and I pray to God that I may never live to behold the death of another child for O my dear Samuel! It is a suffering beyond your conception! You feel, and lament the death of your child, but you ^will^ only recollect him a baby of 14 weeks, but I am his mother, and have carried him in my arms, and have fed ^him^ at my bosom, and have watched over him in by day and by night for 9 months, I have seen him twice at the brink of the grave but he has returned, and recovered and smiled upon me like an angel – and now I am lamenting that he is gone!

On the last day of the last year I shut up the House at Stowey, and in a Chaise with Nanny and the children marched to Bristol. Berkeley was enveloped in flannel and kept at the breast the whole of the way. He travelled very well, and when we entered the city – took great notice of the Lambs and almost capered out of my arms – Mrs Lovell received us (she is in the same house with my mother) and when she carried him in to the light – she was quite struck with the beauty and uncommon appearance of the Child – the small pox had left so few marks as not to be discerned by candle-light she could not believe that he had been ill so recently, we had ever thing comfortable for our reception and when we rose the next day, and he had taken no cold I had great hopes that the change of air would soon cure his cough but it returned in a week and I sent for Mr Morris, I believe he thought I was alarmed without reason from the appearance of the child, he asked what had been done, and he said he had been treated very properly, and he hoped when the weather changed that his breath and cough would mend – and he sent a little syrup, and called every other day, and when he perceived him worse he begged me to pry a blister to the throat, for he thought the difficulty of

breathing proceded [sic] immediately from thence and not from the lungs, this produced no good effort, he continued to grow worse and Mr Morris perceiving he was in great danger begged me reconcile myself to his loss! This was a fortnight before his death – and from that time until he died continued ^we^ in the Bed-Chamber, – Eliza and I were sitting up with him when about two o clock I was so much alarmed as to call up Mrs Lovell and Nanny – I will never forget that night!!!

Mr P. has related to ^you^ what followed, and now my dear Samuel I hope you will be perfectly satisfied that every thing was done for the dear babe that was likely to restore him, and endeavour to forget your own loss in contemplating mine. I cannot express how ardently I long for your return, or how much I shall be disappointed if I do not see you in May. I expect a letter from you daily – and am much surprized that you have not written from Gottingen, your last is dated Jan. the 5th and in it you say you will write again immediately – now this is Easter Sunday March the 24th. You will write me probably after you receive this from Germany – and I wish you would be so good as write me a few lines from London that I may know the very day when I may see you. I shall go to Stowey in a fortnight – my sister Southey will accompany me and dear Hartley[.] Poor Nanny must remain with her mother – she is in a galloping consumption – she has had ^a^ cough ever since I lay-in with my dear lost child – I am happy that the fatigue of his illness rested intirely [sic] on me she never sat up but one whole night – I was obliged to have people to assist at night on account of her cough, and I was obliged to sit up in Bed with him great hours[?] of every night to give the breast for he could not lie down because of his difficulty of breathing, dear, patient Lamb! He was as little trouble as any child in his situation could possibly be[.] I know not whether it is only fancy, but I have sometimes thought that the people here are not so kind as formerly – they do not appear so very glad to see me I mean those of your acquaintance – I believe some of them ^expected^ you to write to them – Cottle gave me a letter from you to Wade – he said, ‘Mr Coleridge was so good as to promise me a letter’ – I took your letter to Mrs Wade – Mr Wade is in America – the letter will be sent. Edith and Southey have behaved towards me with particular kindness – in ^my^ trouble after the loss of my child Southey brought a coach and carried me and Hartley over to Prestbury – where they both strove to amuse me and the child, who is excessively fond of them both as they are of him.

Charles Lloyd has written a ~~comedy~~ ^tragedy^ - I read the manuscript – it is quite a domestic thing – pretty, but I believe nothing very great – he has published a poem on the last fast day – an abuse of the new philosophy, great part of it and an exhortation to his

countrymen to ‘bow the knee’ – he is at Cambridge and his poem is dedicated to Christopher Wordsworth. Lamb is also writing a tragedy I have heard scenes of it – but I cannot judge his vision[?]is again under affliction. – Southey has published a volume of poems last week and his Madoc is nearly finished – and he is getting together more poems for another vol. Chatterton’s Works allowed to be ~~re~~published for the benefit of the family – in two vols. – The Lyrical Ballads are not [MS torn] none but the Nightingale and the River Y.

My [dearest? MS torn] Love! I was quite frightened when you mentioned the amount of your ^dear^ expences! To be sure it has not cost Mr Chester near as much[.] I fear we shall be sadly embarrassed – and the thought of it makes me quite miserable! For I have expended a great deal more than you provided for me which when divided was but little – my mother ten – J.P. five – Rent Maids wages &c &c deprived me of twenty three pounds – however I suppose Mr Poole will supply me untill [sic] your return – I have been obliged to apply to him already – for I keep house here the same as if I were at home. Our dear Hartley you will discover is grown a little – he has a most agreeable little tongue – he talks of his Father every day and I verily believe he will know you at your return, if you will try to come to us soon, if you do not hasten home I myself shall almost forget you! Ah no! indeed I shall not! ---- I am much pleased to see you write that your ‘long wish to be at home’ O God! I hope you never more will quit it! ---- I sent your poem to your brother as you directed in answer to my note, he returned me a most affectionate letter concluding it with an ardent wish to see me, I dare say you will take us down in the Summer. I have still a sad story to relate – my poor brother George has been wrecked on the Coast of Spain – he ^has^ been forced to walk several hundreds of miles untill he was barefooted with no cloaths but those on his back, and only one mule between 5 men – two Boys and one woman[.] he is now at Lisbon waiting for a ship – but how he is sustained there God knows for we have had no letter from the lad himself only a song of round about intelligence from the Sailors who have returned - I should be quite miserable if I had a child in these circumstances – my poor mother is often in tears about him, he is never out of her thoughts!

I shall be at a loss for a servant, poor Nanny was not all that she ought to be – but now she is ill – I think of her with kindness and if she recovers – and ^if she^ wishes it I shall take her back, but how to manage in the mean-time.

Eliza has a lover – he is an American Captain – a Gentleman in his manners and connections – he is now in America but he is expected here in May, she says but little about

him but I believe thinks a great deal – my mother thinks it is merely on his part a little flirtation – it seems he paid her much attention when he was in Bristol and told her that she would see him again in May – which was contrary to his first intention of not again visiting the port – his being a Sailor would be a sufficient objection to me, but I am very sore on the subject of absent husbands just at this time.

My hair during my long confinement was utterly spoiled, I have had it all cut off close to my head, and I believe I must get some false hair untill my own is grown, only I am affriad [sic] you will not like it. I hope my dear you will be so good as to burn all my letters, but some of them may lie about in your drawers after you leave the place ---- my love to Mrs Chester.

I have ^heard^ of you from Gottingen – through Mr Parry. God almighty bless you my dearest love!

Sara C -----

No secrets never – I will not cut it for the sake of my sweet Berkeley.

Sarah Fricker Coleridge to Emily Trevenen, 5 October 1832
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3)

This letter was written a few months after the birth of Edith Coleridge. It details Sara Coleridge's postpartum illness, which according to one medical professional was due to an 'absorption of milk'. Between 1832-1835 Coleridge suffered periods of ill health. These periods of invalidism coincided with her pregnancies. Coleridge, Sarah Fricker Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge travelled to Brighton in the hopes that a change of scenery would improve Coleridge's health. Fricker Coleridge's letters from this time are full of worry about her daughter's welfare.

My dearest friend

As poor dear Sara is too ill to write more than a few lines to Nurse, you I am sure wd rather hear of her through a short immediate letter, than wait for the chance of her being soon able to use her pen. – When I say you, in this instance I mean, of course all more of her dear friends, for you are feeling much anxiety on our account I know H. S. and myself left Hampstead, the dear babes and the servants at ten o' clock yester: and, after the most sad journey I ever undertook, though I have had many uneasy ones, we arrived here [Brighton] at 6 in the evening. Henry on his return ^from Ottery^ instantly resolvd on this step; he went to London and hired a most commodious travelling carriage for a fortnight, into the spacious boxes of which I turn (all in all) I thought necessary, and if Sara could have injured any thing it wd have been this drive of 50 miles on the smoothest road I ever saw. A medical man was sent for, and opiates and opermints were again had recourse too. The sensations for some hours in each day are little short of distraction, and when the irritation a little subsides, an hysterical weeping comes on and she remains for some time in gloom, which is more indcredible[sic] than the terrors of the other state. We cannot afford to live at this delightful hotel at between 30 and 40 shillings per day – so Henry is gone in search of Lodgings, which we must rest at, in a Fly before they can be finally taken.

Dr says it is an absorption of milk – I cannot tell what he said clearly, but the stomach and bowels are much deranged, & it will take some time to set her right, but he sees nothing dangerous. I suppose he means 'nothing to bring a dissolution,' but I fear there may be danger that she may remain a thorough valetudinarian like Miss S. Denton, or E. Cookson, and many others whom we know.

God grant her fears may be unfounded, but this she does fear; she says, she can no longer be a mother to her precious babes, and asks me, with many tears, not to desert them! Blesses the hour that decided my coming to be with her, and if God spare her life, she will exert every nerve to requite me to do I have done & suffered for her. You may imagine what it costs me to hear & see all this! Heaven grant that I may be able to go on with her without hitting[?] a passe; but when dear Henry is gone, how shall I be able to stand it, in this strange place! If she is to take it the end of ten days when he must go, I think I shall propose our all returning together. Change of air and scene was absolutely in dispensable, yet this could not be attained without leaving the sweet children. If they have their health in our absence it will be a blessing we cannot be sufficiently thankful ^for^, but if otherwise, this excursion might be worse than nothing, for the expence & fatigue will make it so and she wd fret so much at leaving them that she wd derive no benefit from anything.

Friday evening. The dr has been here: he is sorry to find she has passed another sleepless night. A blister between the shoulders is to be applied tonight, and in the morning we go to our lodgings – 13 Richmond Place, Brighton. We have been drawing back & forward on the sea shore; she bore it pretty well, and admired the Chain Pier greatly, and it reminded me of our delightful journey, dear friend – though the Pier cannot vie with the Bridges in N. Wales. I have such a pen I can scarcely write – you will excuse it – and I am in much agitation besides, but I thought after in [MS obscured] to dear Mary you wd not rest easy till you heard again. I daresay you saw, or heard that sad account: I hope you also received through it our best thanks for your delightful letters – bless you for them, and for a thousand other things for which you deserve blessings! Dr Mr Grylls! What an affection I feel for that good man. Many thanks to him and his excellent lady for all their kindness to me and mine. It did me much good to read yr account of the S. meeting – and Mr Marsh's elegant simily [sic] on the sermon was very pleasing. Dear Derwent! He is blest in friends and kind opinions if not golden ones, and his dear wife has a large share of Sara also amongst you I am happy to believe; God bless her! and keep off all pains of ^body and^ mind from the dear soul, for she has had already and abundance, I mean 'of mind,' from the pressure upon the nerves, which is the pain of mind you have had, my dear child, otherwise, there is no <u>real</u> trouble I trust [MS torn] either. How stupidly I am expressing myself! My poor head is in [MS torn] there is a tremendous gale blowing at this moment, and the [MS torn] of the sea stuns ones ears: it is fine, but I can hardly bear it. Tell D. that H. forgot to send the '<u>Leeds Mercury':</u> but he shewed the paper at Ottery and Frank will take the work and so will the Col: and Henry and other cousins – I hope the work will sell for the proprietors will not risk me – H. has nothing to do but finish the work, but he is anxious of course, for its success.

'The Worthies of Yorkshire & Lancashire – in 12 parts – by Hartley ^Coleridge^, Part the first just published by Sim[p]kin & Marshall.' (I believe) the each part is 5s[?] but I am not quite sure: it was careless in Henry not to take care of the <u>paper</u>.

Brighton is really a very magnificent place – I had no idea of its magnitude. Perhaps you have seen it. The man comes for the post – God bless you!

ever affectionately yours

S.C.

Letters came from the North just as we were setting off – R.L. was there. Poor James Lynn died of cholera at Boulogne where he was Tutor. They seem pretty well. Miss W. no better Kate thinks she has seen her for the last time! Kind compliments from H.N.C.

Mr Gillman is gone to Calais for his health his son is with S.T.C – is better but grieved since about his Sara! Oh my sweet Herbert how much it cost yr poor grandmama to leave you behind! Ride, ride, ride, said the sweet fellow, as they were fixing on the luggage! He had gone out every day with his poor mama for nearly 3 weeks, and thought he was going again – I daresay he cried as we drove off.

Sarah Fricker to Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones, 6 July 1835
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.3)

This short letter provides information about the genesis of Sara Coleridge's *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children*. The contents of the letter suggests that its recipient, Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones, had asked about the significance of Rachel and Benoni. Fricker Coleridge explains the biblical and Wordsworthian resonances of Rachel's death.

'Benoni,' the child of my sorrow, or dejection; (The little book) in allusion to those lines of Wordsworth's in ^Peter^ Bell, – she called her child 'Benoni' – see Rachel, Genesis, 36 chap:

Dearest Mrs Jones,

I am quite ashamed that I never should have asked the question you put to me yesterday: the moment Sara said, 'think of poor Rachel!' I recollected, as; rather recognized the allusion. This little book [Pretty Lessons] has, indeed, been the fruit of her affliction – for it never would have been thought of if she had not been prostrate on her sick bed – for she never read, or wrote so little as during the short time that she was able to perform the duties of a wife & mother: she sends her kindest, best regards to you & dear Mrs Park: she was much pleased at your approbation, and begged me to tell you that it was Henry who gave the word to the printer, and she was surprized to see it there.

Our thanks for the delicious honey, which is greatly prized, for the straw, and for your love and kindness at all times.

God bless you! & yours truly,

S. Coleridge.

Mary Edward Coleridge to Emily Trevenen, 24 September 1845
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.8)

This letter was written by Sara Coleridge's sister-in-law, Mary Keate Bradford Edward Coleridge, on the day of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's death. Mary's husband Edward tutored Herbert at Eton College. Sara Coleridge had arrived at Eton shortly before her mother's death. The letter describes the circumstances of Fricker Coleridge's death and Coleridge's reaction upon hearing the news from Derwent.

Dear Madam

Tho' a stranger to you personally, my name is not unknown to your nor yours to me, & I now address you at the request of my poor dear sister Sara who has just left me in deep affliction & agitation, Derwent having arrived unexpectedly a few hours ago to break to her ^appalling intelligence of^ the sudden death of her poor mother whom she left better than usual on this day week to come & pay us a school visit. She had a letter from her this morn written yesterday in which she spoke of having felt her breath worse than usual in going upstairs after breakfast, & that nurse insisted upon it she wanted medicine & was bothering her to see the apothecary.

It appears that she suffered still more in going up after dinner, & nurse of her own accord sent for him. He did not seem to think there was much the matter but ordered her to take a dose last night & not to get up till he had seen her this morn. However when nurse went into the room this morn, aunt said she had had an excellent night & should get up but not go down till Mr Newton had been.

At 9 o clock nurse went to see if she was ready for her to fasten her dress & found her seated in her chair washing her face, so turned to the door to go out again till she was ready. She happened however to turn round before she shut the door, & saw my poor aunt's head and dewy drops on her shoulders. She rushed to the bell to ring for the Cook & before she could reach the chain again my aunt was on the floor. The Cook came up at that moment & assisted in lifting her on the bed, but life was extinct. They set off instantly for Derwent who lost no time in coming down here to break the terrible news to his poor sister to whom the shock was of course dreadful, but happily she gave way to a violent burst of hysteric grief, which terminated in a <u>good fit</u> of crying. This relieved her greatly, & it was wonderful how soon she recovered her self-command & set about collecting her papers, & letters & preparing for her journey, & she went off comparatively composed at 3 o clock. We wished very much to keep her here, but she said she must go, & see her dead mother's corpse before she could sleep again. Mrs Derwent Coleridge was in Chester Place to receive her, & will stay there as long as she desires to have her I hope, for I cannot bear the idea of her being left alone in that melancholy house. She will of course feel this sudden separation very severely at first, but <u>we</u> cannot help seeing much to be thankful for, in her being spared the prospect which she thought was before her in nursing her mother through a long lingering bedridden last illness, which would have tried <u>both</u> terribly. Surely all is ordered for the best & <u>we</u> can see it most clearly in this case that dear Sara cannot at present of course but she will in time I feel assured. She begged me to say she would write to you herself as soon as she possibly could & desired her best love. I beg to remain dear Madame yours, very faithfully,

Mary Coleridge

It is supposed that an affection of the heart was the cause of my good aunt's sudden end, tho' her medical man never discovered it but Sara has had a suspicion of it in her own mind for some time & was talking to me about it only yesterday.

Appendix 1.2 Sara Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge Letters

Below are transcriptions of letters dated 1832-1852.

1.2a Sara Coleridge to Mary Pridham Coleridge, 25-28 October 1832
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 8.3-9.4)

Sara Coleridge wrote this letter to her sister-in-law (Derwent's wife) a few months after giving birth to Edith Coleridge. Coleridge was in Brighton at the time with her husband and mother: she mentions the expense of travelling there and the local sightseeing spots they have visited. She suffered from 'hysteria', a nineteenth-century medical term used to describe illnesses related to the womb. Her symptoms included low appetite, depression, joint pain, and bowel problems. That Coleridge opens her letter by identifying Mary Pridham Coleridge as a fellow 'nervous hysteric' suggests that Mary had also suffered from postpartum illness.

My dearest Sister,

It is a strange satisfaction that we nervous hysterics take in learning that our friends have been as miserable as ourselves – the consolation however is not derived from their sufferings but from their restoration – what woman has weathered woman may weather – right thankful should I be to reach such a tranquil haven as you, my Mary, are I trust firmly anchored in. – Your energies of body & mind must be fully restored or you could never go through the duties of your bustling establishment in the way you are now doing. – I believe this complaint while it lasts is one of the most afflictive that human nature is liable to: - I have been very lightly visited comparatively speaking – yet I had rather go through all my other aches & pains & poorliness – including both lyings in – in short every other bodily trial of my life than live over again the last two months. When in my worst state I felt a loathing of life and at the same time a morbid horror of death: - I seemed to myself like a dead-alive wretch surrounded, like Tantalus, with all that could make me supremely blest could I but enjoy it, but which only aggravated my misery palsied in body and mind as I felt: - then my children. I cannot describe to you the tearless anguish with which I thought of them: I felt that any ill befalling ^them^ would bereave me of reason, & yet their welfare could not give me pleasure. I ^will^ dwell no more however on these horrors – I hope & pray that they are gone forever & though my mind & body are still far from sanity they are I trust equally far from the wretched state I have been describing. My appetite for solid food is returned – my nights are now rather wakeful than absolutely sleepless - & my spirits, though full of tremulous

apprehensiveness & irritability, are relieved from that dreadful gloom: I am still Mrs Much afraid & Ready to Sink, but not Mrs Despair & Despondency. I may relapse in some degree – but I trust there is a permanent improvement. The endless variety of ^disturbing^ bodily sensations which filled me with terror, though not quite gone, are very greatly mitigated. Time and patience will I doubt not complete my cure. I trust I shall get well without more Doctor's bills or fees – but I am very glad to hear of a medical man who is well skilled in the disorder: should I need further aid or advice I will apply to Mr Travers. Dr Blundell & Dr Chambers are very clever in puerperal cases & mine is decidedly such. Your kindness in urging our visiting you is deeply felt by us & I trust the time will come when an interchange of visits will be perfectly feasible and attended with as much unalloyed enjoyment as this world admits of – but at present the scheme would not be practicable for us. We cannot afford any additional expense – this Brighton affair will make a sad hole in our finances - & a long journey with or without children is what none of my medical advisers would at all countenance. My mental miseries have originated exclusively in bodily weakness arising from my having, as Mr L. says, taken too much out of myself by wholly supporting my children: nothing whatever had occurred to agitate or distress me and I had every intention & expectation of being extremely happy & comfortable when the disorder overtook me. This being the case whatever fatigues me must be injurious & such a journey in my present weak state would quite knock me up. I deeply regret, dearest Mary, that our lot is cast so far asunder – for I fear the lack of strength & of money will prevent us from seeing much of each other for many years & our dear children will not form that early intimacy which I should have delighted in their forming. However we must hope for the best – we may be brought together sooner than I have been anticipating. Your sweet Dervy! it fits me mad when I think that I cannot at present see & know him. I hope his little ferverishness is gone off. And so he talks of Herbert & Edith. God bless him and them! I've had good accounts of the darlings ever since we have been here – except that baby occasionally suffers from flatulency & relaxed bowels: this makes her very cross at times, but she thrives & looks well in spite of this ailment. Darling Herby improves in talking and is in excellent health – though he is cutting the two last of his milk teeth: the ^back^ double ones. You ask about our dear friends in the North – they are going on much as usual – they have seen a great deal of gay & witted company during the season and are now preparing for their winter seclusion. I am grieved to hear so much about their delicacy, especially that of dear Edith: - Mrs Stanger tells me that her looks surprized and grieved her, & she speaks of herself as a bag of bones, declares that she looks 40 & so on. However her last was written in pretty good spirits. Mr Warter is not

expected till next July; if in the course of the summer he meets with nothing to enable him to claim my cousin's hand forthwith he means to spend the ensuing winter at Keswick, which E. declares is a more enjoyable prospect than that of marriage, which the trials & sufferings of her young wedded friends make her almost tremble to think of. I hope whenever she does pass the Rubicon she will be one of the lucky ones & I really think that a change in her condition would stimulate her & be of use to her health. The Wordsworths too are going on very quietly & Dora seems to be thinking of no change in her state: - but Mrs John W. has some intention I believe of shewing the world, some day or other, what a compound of Curwen & Wordsworth is like. Poor dear Miss Wordsworth is much tried by the changes of the weather – I cannot think of her present state and approaching departure, (for it appears to be uncertain whether or no she can struggle through the winter,) without deep melancholy. Her decay, before the end of the stage of middle life, was what I never anticipated. She is connected with my earliest childish remembrances and indeed with those of every period of my youth & in my present weakened state of mind I cannot think of her being taken away with that cheerfulness & composure with which the dear invalid herself contemplates it. Aunt George too! She is a riper fruit and her fall was more to be looked for – yet it is with deep regret that I hear of her increasing weakness. She seemed so happily situated when I visited her last Autumn that I thought several years of peaceful enjoyment were yet in store for her. She is now so weak that a turn in the passage fatigues her. Her niece Miss Chamberlain is taking care of her – sometimes I hope that she may yet rally – This season has been remarkably trying to the weak: - nervous debility has been quite the order of the year. My aunt C. in her last inquires kindly about you: she says that she has had no seizures lately but that her memory fails her sadly. My Uncle does not seem to be any weaker or worse than he was some months ago – & I cannot help thinking he may yet be spared longer than has been predicted. Aunt Hathaway is recovered from a late attack. The doctors gave her up above 40 years ago & now she is able to be up & drest. October 28/ I have just had an excellent account of my chicks from kind Mrs Park – imagine how I long to see them. When did that those queer state of interior come round with you? mine is still going on just as you describe - & this has been the case ever since my weakness commenced. Another concern too is still out of order – mention when you write how long you were in coming right in that particular. I now have Mr E.'s bill rather hanging in terrorem over me. I believe I have been as skilfully healed by that gent. as I could have been by any one. He has had considerable experience in such cases ^as mine^. Only think of Mrs Wm Coleridge, after so much previous weakness, & after all the fatigues, privations & miseries consequent upon the hurricane, being herself in

confirmed health & mother of a child ^a boy^ whom she describes as a nonesuch for size & other perfections! The little Eton Cake as we call her, has at last got a boy more after her own pattern than her other children: Alfred the small is said to be quite a young giant – short-coated already on account of his size - & in all respects a thriver. Henrietta, Fanny's babe, is only too fat & quite satisfactory in all ways. E. Patteson luckily was in a state to allow of her travelling at the time when the judge was obliged to leave Ottery. Accordingly the whole party left Heath's Court together – but Fanny is to return in a fortnight. She cannot make up her mind to leave her parents, in their present precarious state in the house by themselves. Frank & Harriet are overjoyed to have some other member of the family to share their care & responsibility in regard to the declining couple. Harriet will have occupation of her own again in February – another 'little superfluity,' as Mr Wordsworth would call it, being expected at the Cottage. It seems that Frank has been making fresh improvements in this domicile of his, – he now looks upon it as his permanent residence. I confess this appears to me an unwise resolve: Frank's family is large & may be larger. His temper is hospitable & his visiting acquaintance large – the Cottage can never be more than partially comfortable – the drawing room is disproportioned to the new dining room, & there is no good bedroom in the house. Frank's prospects are good & could admit of his looking forward to a more capacious abode. George's is the real comfortable country house – everything there is in keeping, and comfort & departe are there to be found in exactly the proper relative proportions. John will I suppose eventually be the proprietor of Heath's Court: this of course is quite proper both on account of his circumstances & also his being the person whose son will represent the family – but there is not much said about it because James, we rather suspect, does not in his own mind quite relish an arrangement which prevents his playing the part of alert son in the eye of the world: this is a natural feeling, which however James's good sense will induce him to keep in the background – he is now at Ottery – his general strength is returning – but his eye is not yet quite clear. John & his family are returned to town – all in better health than usual. The former is going to Bristol about the trial of the magistrates. It is grievous indeed my dear Mary, to think that poor Miss Trevenen should have so much trouble and anxiety about her domestics. I shall be anxious to hear that Alice is recovered. Miss Trevenen is so delicate herself that she ought not to have those about her whose health is precarious. My dear Henry writes oftener to me now than he would do if I were not in such a nervous apprehensive state. He is now at Clifton but will return to Bath on Wednesday. He has found the business hitherto easier than he expected but he anticipates more difficulty elsewhere. He likes his college [MS obscured] very much. He is well on the whole but both

he & Mr P. were much deranged internally at Bath – they supposed by the water. He will not be at home before the 25th of November. He has left off his wig mama thinks he looks worse therefore – but most folks pretty w prefer his present grey pate to those borrowed feathers. I myself am of this number. The shape of his head & forehead were spoilt by the wig. All at the Grove greatly approve the change. Indeed I should do so whether it looked better or not. My dearest mother is in very good health on the whole: her hands are to be sure in a tormenting state, & she has been troubled with cold & rheumatism: but she looks very nicely. I cherish & hope in my heart of hearts that hers will be a green old age. She can never wholly divest herself of anxiety about poor dear H. – I think it is much better for none of us to be very sanguine about his perseverance in any long undertaking. I mean that our minds should be prepared for the worst – if things turn out better than was fully expected our satisfaction will be the greater. Still the undertaking is concluded I shall try to keep my mind in this middle state. The last account of my dear father was a comfortable one – but we began to be anxious for another – I wrote to Mrs G. some time ago but have received no answer. Nurse tells me that one of the young Gs called at our house but she was out & heard of no one pass from the Grove. I hope your brother, my dear Mary, will cast his skin[?] soon – you know my father says young men have as many coats as an onion & if the centre be sound and good all will be right in the end. I am sorry that Mrs Pridham should have so much anxiety on this score – that of the cholera. I [MS obscured] your visit in [MS obscured] [MS torn] to which to dear Derwent in spite of danger but I trust you will not be tried. I am told the disorder has in some measure changed its type - that it has become more [MS obscured] than it was formerly. This Brighton is really a very pleasant & convenient place & the good roads & short distance render it very accessible from London. Had I been well I should have enjoyed the stay here very much – saving & excepting the separation from the darlings. The Chain Pier is very curious – and the Pavilion is a droll fantastic pile ~~very~~ unworthy indeed the name of a ‘palace’ but well enough had it been designed to inclose or other such shews or be contained by a set of shops. It looks like a great overgrown toy & is the most undignified pile imaginable. The Church just opposite to us (St Peter’s) is really very beautiful, but my nerves could have excused its striking the quarters. The Terraces & Squares on the East & West Cliffe are full of the most superb mansions, & house rent is higher here than in London. The walking is very comfortable – the streets generally are flat & very clean – being nicely paved with brick. Here too you may be as quiet & independent as in London owing to the great size of the place, & there is an air of bustle & cheerfulness which is desirable for visitants who come on an errand of health or pleasure. The bustle & stir is that of gaiety not of business. We

have been much favoured in the weather sine our stay. Brighton must be very hot in summer & cold in spring. This is the high season which makes lodgings dear. We pay two guineas & a half for the nut shell apartments – which, though airy are far from the sea & not in what is considered a good situation. However we have gone to the sea on fly-back & have been very comfortable as far as quarters are concerned. Our hostess a nice culture[?] – all civility & not mercenary. How I wish that all your party with dear Miss Trevenen could join our household & spend a summer month or so at this place! We must next year somehow or other! Well I will not try to desire the prospect now but will cherish a general hope that the thing may be brought about somehow or other. You must send to dearest Derwent and our excellent friend Miss Trevenen such parts of this letter as will interest them and believe me my dearest Mary your most attached sister Sara Coleridge. My kindest love to dear Miss Trevenen. We never expect to hear from dear Derwent except in holiday time. We must be content with hearing of him. Mr Lawrence says that I must not attempt to nurse another infant if I should be a mother again: this is rather a stroke to me on more accounts than one. The event would be salutary to my health he says this caution being observed. It seems to me now that to be restored to perfect health and strength would be too great a happiness. Insensible indeed must that heart be to which such a trial as this does not make a salutary impression – inducing the firmest resolution to employ in God's service & that of our fellow creatures those energies of body and mind which it is distressing to be deprived of – & the full value of which scarcely anything but the temporary loss of them, while the intellect is still unimpaired, can impress upon one's mind. My beloved husband & mother have behaved angelically to me – the thought of becoming a burden to them was one of my worst horrors. All my friends have written most affectionately to me since my illness & I thankfully acknowledge that I have had every comfort & alleviation which my case would admit. Poor Fanny Patteson suffered much last winter from nervous horrors. I cannot feel quite satisfied about her having no other advice than that of Mr Arnot[?] When the horrors first came upon me I thought myself bewitched – I had no notion ^till then^ that such feelings were ever produced by a mere bodily cause. Since then I have heard of fellow sufferers in abundance.

1.2b Sara Coleridge to Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge, 28 February 1834

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.9)

This letter is addressed to Henry Nelson Coleridge's mother, Frances Duke Taylor Coleridge. It was written just over a month after the death of Berkeley and Florence Coleridge in January 1834. Coleridge laments the death of her babies but notes that 'I soon felt reconciled to parting with them and thankful that they were spared further suffering'. She talks about Harriet Norris Coleridge (Francis George Coleridge's wife) and Mary Pridham Coleridge.

On the reverse side of the letter is a postscript written by Henry Nelson Coleridge (see figure 5). He tells his mother that Coleridge wrote the letter 'in the interval of hysterics'. This suggests that Coleridge was still suffering after the birth and death of the twins. A note in Sarah Fricker Coleridge's hand is appended to the address: 'A most interesting letter of poor Sara's just after the Birth & death of the Twins. – & of the marriage of my beloved niece – Edith Southey – now Mrs John W. Warter. Mrs Coleridge/Heath's Court'.

My dearest Mother

Your kind letter has given me the greatest pleasure and I will not defer thanking you for it and for the childrens and other Ottery cheer which you have sent me since I have been unable to acknowledge your kindness with my own pen. I now have great mercies of our heavenly Father toward me and mine to record: since I last wrote to you my dearest aunt I have passed safely through great peril and am uninjured by the trial – The wind was indeed tempered to me & my pains were light in proportion to my weakness. Of course the exhaustion of the confinement aggravated my usual grievances for a time, but I am now better in many respects, & I must try to encourage hope & believe the predictions of my friends that my powers will be gradually restored to me. Of my little departed infants I will only say that I soon felt reconciled to parting with them and thankful that they were spared further suffering – though no mother can part with the tenderest weakling to which she has given birth without some sorrowful emotion. Our dear little Herbert and Edith are indeed blessedly healthy and have hitherto caused no anxiety. Herbert had a glorious visit with his kind aunty in Bedford Square. She was only too indulgent to him & his cousins were most goodnatured to make a

playmate of him as they did, he being so much younger than themselves. I feared he would not be soon reconciled to home, but he has been as happy as ever in his little nursery since his return from his aunt's spacious abode. Fanny's [Duke Patteson, Henry's sister] taking charge of the children for so long a time when quietness was very desirable for me was done with her usual friendliness. Mama, who is not apt to use very strong expressions ^in general^ said to me on the occasion – 'Fanny is quite an angel – she delights in doing good!'

I have been rejoiced my dear mother by the favorable accounts of your health that I have lately heard & very glad I am that you think the sea town beneficial. I thank you for your prayers on my behalf and am much gratified by your ^kind^ expressions respecting my mother. She is indeed devoted to duty, & has been so throughout her life & her heart is warm and affectionate: I believe the consciousness that she contributes so much to our comfort and welfare repays ^her^ for all her care and exertion. I hope they will not long be needed & that I shall be able to return her services in some measure ere long. She sends her kindest love to you and my Uncle & is delighted to hear that your health is improved since last Summer. I hope my Uncle will enjoy the fine cheerful weather which we may look for in another month.

I was sorry to hear that Harriet [wife of Henry's brother, Francis George Coleridge] had met with a mishap and hope it will not be succeeded by any more adventures of the same kind. Pray remember me very kindly to her and to Frank, whose prosperity I rejoice in. His six flourishing olive branches form no small part of his felicity I daresay: the last sprig of all, the little blooming Emma I long to become acquainted with. I hear that Edward's young Alfred is quite as strong and large as he promised to be when an infant. The account of Mary Derwent lead us to think that all probability of miscarriage in her case is now at an end – and

I daresay her constitution will be improved by her giving birth to a second child. The descriptions which I receive of little Derwent from various quarters make me very impatient to see him. Poor Miss Nicholls' illness seems to have been as short as it was violent – I hope she will have no return of the dreadful agitations. Henry and Fanny tell me that our Lawhitton nieces are much improved in mind & person – I daresay they will be very sweet young women. What a charming family we Coleridges are! Talking of <u>charmers</u> my very dear cousin Edith [May Warter] was here yesterday with ^her^ good man and delighted I was to see her so cheerful and apparently so strong and well. It was unfortunate that Warter should have the influenza just at this time when he ought to be tending his bride to visit her different London friends. He was suffering [but? – MS torn] recovered a few days ago to dine with

^her^ at the Abp of Canterbury's. At the end of this week they go to their new abode in Sussex of which they hear very excellent reports. It is only a few miles from the sea. It is a great comfort to me that my dear Henry's lectures are now concluded. I believe they gave the greatest satisfaction. He is looking well & I trust that his precious health will be preserved. I dare say he will wish to add a few lines – I will therefore finish my part of the letter. Is it not a happy thing that Mary continues so well! I hope she will get well over March & then I suppose she is safe for the summer. Pray give my kind duty to my dear father and believe me, my dearest mother, your much attached daughter Sara Coleridge.

Henry has brought an indifferent account of my poor father today. He has been much better lately. Sophia [James Coleridge's wife] is looking delicate at present, but Fanny bright and healthful – and Mary's face is plumper than I ever remember to have seen it. I am glad my father has an interesting occupation out of doors – But I must cross no more.

[In Henry Nelson's hand]

My dearest mother –

I have only an inch or two & a minute or two to write. I trust you are pretty comfortable at present. This weather is exquisitely delightful to be sure – altho', I believe something rather sharper would be more beneficial to Sara. Her miserable state will not be guessed from this cheerful letter – wich [sic] she wrote in the intervals of hysterics. Edward wishes me not to come to Ottery till Easter Monday, in order that you may not have both of us together. But I can hardly manage this.

And I hope you will not find three days three days of us too much. I hope this mild weather will be beneficial to ~~us~~ my ^father^ & Coleridge. I have mentioned more particulars in my note to James. God bless you, my dearest brother & father, & believe me ever affect. & dutifully yours H.N.C.

[In Sarah Fricker Coleridge's hand]

A most interesting letter of poor Sara's just after the Birth & death of the Twins. – & of the marriage of my beloved niece – Edith Southey – now Mrs John W. Warter. Mrs Coleridge/Heath's Court.

1.2c Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge, 21 October 1836
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 6.5-7.2)

Sara Coleridge wrote this letter during her convalescence at Ilchester. In October 1836 Coleridge was travelling back to London from Ottery St. Mary with Herbert and Edith when she had a nervous breakdown. She was sent to the Castle Inn where she remained until November. In this letter, Coleridge responds to Henry Nelson Coleridge's entreaties that she return to London forthwith. She is adamant that she cannot travel and, although her constitution is improving, she is still weak.

My beloved Henry

Last night I took a composing draught (not laudanum) and powder ^(not mercury)^ to make my lines behave itself better . I had a less disturbed night than the one before – and was tranquilized by the draught, but slept very little. The doctor today says my pulse is fuller, & my tongue less coated & that I am somewhat better. I take chicken broth - & Mr S. & his partner Mr Francis (in whose care I even now left for a little while by necessity) are anxious above all things to keep me up with nourishment.

Your letter of Thursday 20, (received last night,) was just such a cordial as my fainting heart needs, but still it agitates me to see that you have yet no true notion of my weakness, & still fancy that I can travel in ten days. No more than I can drag the carriage myself to Ottery. Consider that I am confined to my bed, & literally as weak as the first fortnight after the birth of the twins. I do not weep as I did then: but my strength is in some respects even more gone. From that plague how slowly I recovered! A year afterward I could just bear half an hour in a carriage & that made me hysterical. Ottery is just as much out of sight at present for me as Hampstead. A man may be poisoned by a vial of prussic acid as well as by a quart bottle full. You must not argue on my case as on one of ordinary weakness. People in the last stage of consumption have travelled many ~~peoples~~ miles. People in ^some^ nervous disorders have been taken out of their beds to travel without ultimate injury. It is not because I am weak that I cannot travel, but because I have a peculiar nervous affection which renders the motion of a carriage insufferable, & productive of the most injurious and long

lasting effects. Unless my whole frame is to be paralyzed with nervous debility I must not leave this place for a long time – till I feel very very differently. Mama is all terror lest I should be moved a should be moved a third time against the remonstrances of my own sensations. Dear Fanny talks of a litter – would to heaven such a thing were possible for me some time hence – for how I can bear a stage of 12 miles ere many & many a month has elapsed I know not. Twere better never to leave this room again than bring myself to that state of powerlessness & wretchedness to which I may arrive if in my now weakened state I am forced upon exertion.

I do not complain of anything that has past – if anything but this – for one terror occupies my mind – that of being again put into a carriage. Remember Mrs Scott of Clapton – how she lay for a fortnight in a trance and for six weeks could not speak or stir from over pressure upon the nervous system: were I thrown in such a state, with my little stamina (she was a far stronger woman than I originally) I should never recover as she did. O my dearest husband, while I am yet in possession of my faculties, & still can enjoy the air I breathe, do not out of mistaken notions, drive me on to ruin. As it is my constitution is lowered for years – perhaps for ever. After all that has come to pass do not think these representations the dreams of disorder – they are real probabilities. There are many reasons why Mr. P. should speak favourably. He does not know me. Besides he knows very well that I am not fit to travel for a long time. How did Mr Lawrence talk. I should never hurt myself with over walking. I should be well in a few weeks. To Mr Law[?] Francis[?] said I might have a child like a Hercules – then came the turns: and Mr Haynes could have wished an estate on the event of my performing the journey with advantage. Of a disorder so peculiar as mine none but the patient can judge as to some things – and the experience of many patients makes up all that Doctors know on the subject, if they have happened to hear of nervous cases where the general aspect was the same as mine, but particular things different they will be misled like Mr Haynes. God bless you & forgive me all the trouble & misery I cause you.

3 o clock. My dearest love excuse all my irritability but indeed I say what is only too true. You may suppose how my heart sinks ever & anon. I pray to the Saviour & derive I trust some comfort from him. But O my earthly prospect is sad, my dear husband – my children – separated from them at a stroke! Indeed were I at Hampstead I could do nothing for any of you. God will perhaps raise me up sooner than now seems possible. Would but sleep & natural appetite return! I was much exhausted with writing it down. I can write no more. God bless you my dear beloved & excellent husband Sara Coleridge.

Pray write to beloved Fanny & tell about me I have not power to write to her yet. Thank her a thousand times for ^all^ her kindness to our children.

1.2d Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge, 10 November 1836
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 6.5-7.2)

Another letter written during Coleridge's convalescence at Ilchester. Coleridge insists that she is still unable to travel and scorns Henry Nelson Coleridge's claim that returning to London would cause 'no serious harm'. She explains that if although 'our interest is in common… as we have two bodies you cannot feel, & therefore cannot understand the amount of pressure on one side of the question'. She ends her letter by sending love to Fanny Duke Patteson Coleridge and Sarah Fricker Coleridge.

My dearest Henry

Your letter has thrown ^me^ into a state of agitation which I will not describe – it would make no alteration in your opinions, & Heaven is my witness that I make no complaints which give pain to you for the mere sake of complaining. I reject all those burning expressions which suggest themselves to my mind in crowds, & will endeavour to write only at the dictation of that highest mind which has nothing in common with the body. O who will deliver me from this body ^of^ death! How indeed I do intensely long, like my poor father, to have my imprisoned ^spirit^ released from this tabernacle of weakness & misery, and yet, such are the bonds of the flesh, I cannot contemplate the prospect of death with composure. Your <u>expressions</u> my love are fond & gentle, but you virtually deny all my requests, which nothing but absolute necessity induced me to prefer. The loss of the money will bear almost as heavy on me as on you, & the misery of causing so much affliction to my poor mother, & of her remaining here with a heavy burden on my heart is only overpowered in me by such a bodily pressure as no <u>human being</u> could resist. I must now request an answer to one question – do not shut your eyes to ^the^ probability, face possibility if you will. <u>When I arrive at Wincaunton if I am in the same state as when I arrived here, with my pulse rapid, my</u>

stomach deranged, & my whole nervous system in a tumult, is it your wish that I should proceed? You know Mr Shoreland's opinion that, had I proceeded on my journey in the state that he first saw me in, death might have been the consequence. 'Would it be of any service to remain here till Xmas – would not the horror be always the same?' I am not now pleading to remain till that time, but I must tell you that were it possible it would be of the greatest service. The journey being at a distance my mind would be calm though sorrowful; time would bring strength; my nerves would be firmer the further I advanced from the period of the original shock, & thus my horror would not be so great as it ^is^ now. And why? Because the weakness from which the horror proceeds would be less. The only conditions on which I can gain strength are a calm mind. The only reason why I gained the degree of firmness which you witnessed when here was because the journey was indefinitely postponed. I cannot have perfect ^confidence^ in the accounts of sick ladies conveyed safely in the cot carriage, because I have heard many such stories of spine sufferers, consumptive persons &c being conveyed safely in common carriages, where they reclined. That I know would not answer for me. Recollect I do not say that the cot carriage will not perfectly answer – if there really is no motion, it will: – but there is a risk. Keep this letter, and read it hereafter. 'It cannot seriously harm you!' alas incredulity, and disinclination to face an unpleasant truth have brought me to my present sad pass, & will probably bring me to a worse ere long. Could you see all my anguish spread out before your sensuous eye in all its miserable reality that picture would have such an effect on your mind as my words never can, and my incapacity would be as much credited as if my body were covered over with ghastly wounds. 'A rapid journey to London is the least of the evils that surround us.' ^Certainly if I can perform it safely but^ if I cannot perform it without destruction to my health, without destroying life or rendering it a burden, what then? It will indeed be the dearest act of love I ever performed to undertake this trial as you will have me undertake it. Your coming, my love, I entirely give up, but this I consider it a duty of self-preservation to request, that the carriage may not be ordered till I begin to rise out of my present relapse, & that when it does come it may be on the understanding that I am not to set out till I am in my calmer better way.– Mr Francis has just been here. He says it would be madness for me to attempt the journey in such a state as I am now in. Though I slept well last night, (little expecting the misery of the morning, after your expressions when you were here, that I was not to set out till I felt myself able), my pulse is as disordered as it was the day before yesterday. He proposes of his own accord writing to you, but alas! if his view of the case accords ^with mine^ it will be said that he is improperly indulgent, and has an interest in the question. He proposed a medical man going with me to

town. I told him plainly that the expence rendered such a plan out of the question. I do not expect that I can sleep tonight after what has occurred, and then strength, appetite, spirits all go. We take each other for sickness & for health but O how few of us think of aught but health when those words are uttered! Could you but see the necessity of the case I know you would submit like a Christian to this inevitable calamity, which is not brought on by any fault of my own. I try to steel myself against the worse, but O who can steel themselves against such a prospect as mine? ----

I slept well last night, but waking at intervals felt very languid. How irritation gives me a degree of false strength – increased weakness afterwards is always the consequence. I will not say a word about poor Nurse's opinion: – her word would go for nothing as my mother's always did. Those persons who alone have the opportunity of seeing me as I am are believed to be infected with my weakness. 'No serious harm' – Has it done me serious harm to come hither? Did the journey to Ottery do me serious harm? Why was the journey from Ottery hither, so much worse than that from Hampstead to Ottery? Why will the journey hence be worse than any previous one? The wrapper need not be sent – I could name another vest that would be more likely to be needed. True our interest is in common, but as we have two bodies you cannot feel, & therefore cannot understand the amount of pressure on one side of the question. Poor Nurse is crying. Will there be any use in getting me to Wincaunton, there to be worse than I was when I first came hither? Will ~~there be any use~~ the expence be less if I am hurried into the journey when I cannot perform it? 'O come without delay!' what! as I am now? Whether I am calmer on the 20th than now or not? With this prospect before me I can never be calm. Had you said in your letter just this – 'You shall not set out till you have resigned your strength – the cot carriage shall wait at Ilchester till you have ^had^ a good night after its' arrival – the expence is heavy but [it will? MS torn] be to me as a merchant must bear the loss when his ship is sunk by the tempest which God sends' – how different would my nerves be at this moment. How much more capable should I be of attempting the journey in safety within a reasonable time? Write thus I beseech you, my beloved husband, the lover and friend of my youth, the father of our dear children. Write thus & speak peace to the tempest which is agitating me & ruining my health & every chance for happiness. – I have never overstated my sufferings. I have suffered them for my dear mother's sake & for yours; have endeavoured to talk & write of other subjects for all our sakes. There must be many of the cot carriages from what I hear of them, though all from one place. I would not try the cc before setting out, though you yourself (when here) proposed my doing so: – all I

implore is not to be tied to a day. Let my tongue & pulse be in what state they may. If I reach Hampstead paralyzed or dead what will it signify that husband, mother & children are there – what good will my return do them?

If you engage the carriage now, & tie me, at all events, to the 20th I shall be ^in^ no state to set out on that day. I cannot extract from Mr Francis an opinion that if the worst comes to the worst it will not be very dreadful. 'Do not frighten yourself – don't bring on a bad night by thinking of the journey!' thus people talk. If you had a chance of being struck dead tomorrow would you help thinking of it – could you secure a good night by any self management? 2 o clock. Do not shew this letter to dearest Fanny, kind & excellent as she is. The cool metal has no sympathy with heated iron and language which to those who can appreciate my state of sensation would appear natural & appropriate to her will seem extravagant & absurd. She has had ^severe^ nervous agitation but it is past. In her the cause soon ceased – then the tumult subsided – but when the cause of irritation continues to what height may the tumult rise?

I do not mean to infer that dearest Fanny is not still a great sufferer from nervous irritation – but I myself, before I left Ottery could not image to myself, such a state of mind as I am now in, & Heaven forbid that she should ever be able to do so! I owe her & her amiable & excellent husband the deepest gratitude for the tenderness they have shewn me personally & for their benefits to my children. Thanks to dear Frank & Harriet for the renewal of invitation. God bless and preserve my beloved mother! She has ever been the most devoted of mothers. I hope our mother at Ottery is recovering at least as well as usual. She was most kind.

Port time approaches my dear husband & I have nothing to add – it is vain to talk of my state. The serious harm is the aggravation of nervous weakness, which if pushed to the extreme may end fatally. God bless you! my dearest husband & God bless my dearest mother.

Your deeply attached wife Sara Coleridge.

1.2e Henry Nelson Coleridge to Robert Southey, 11 March 1838
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0860, container 2.3)

In this brief note Henry Nelson Coleridge tells Robert Southey that Sara Coleridge has just been delivered of a stillborn.

My dear friend –

I write a line to say that poor Sara has been suddenly & prematurely confined of a still-born child. She suffered more than usual, but has gone on well since, & is now, I hope, in safety. It took us by surprise, & we were sadly unprepared. Dora Wordsworth was coming to us the same evening from Dover: but she went on to Hampstead. Mary Derwent, we hear, has experienced the same fate; but is now quite well.

Edith [May Southey] writes that you & Bertha [Southey] come to London in May. We beg a day or two of Bertha at least. My poor aunt is a good deal broken of late. She & Sara send their best love to all: & believe me in haste ever yours most truly H.N. Coleridge

I forgot to say that Mathison desired me, if I had an opportunity, to assure you, with reference to his letter, that he is under proper guidance, & working with the approbation of the Archbishop &c. He knew his manner might be rambling or enthusiastic.

I can warrant him round.

10 Chester Place R.P.

11 March 1838.

1.2f Sara Coleridge to Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones, 9 July 1840
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 10.4-5)

This letter was written shortly before the birth of Bertha Fanny Coleridge. In it, Sara Coleridge asks Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones to act as the child's godmother.

Though writing even the shortest note exhausts & pains me in my present very weak & irritable state, yet I cannot feel satisfied, dear friend, without expressing to you with my own hand, how much I am pleased by your kind acceptance of the office which Henry and I both wish to put upon you, and the very kind words which you made use of on the occasion. In regard to responsibility – if I had thought that it involved any, I should have scrupled to

attempt imposing such a burden on you, – as indeed I should have scrupled, in regard to myself, to take upon me the name of godmother to six different children as I unhesitatingly have done, for whatever the theory of sponsorship may be (and I never yet met anyone who seemed to me to have a very intelligible & satisfactory theory in the subject, when one comes to examine the words which are usually uttered on this matter by vote) – yet the fact is, & as the world is regulated at present, must be, that a religious education of children rests almost wholly & solely with those who have the bringing of them up in other respects, together with the spiritual pastors & masters whom the Church appoints. 'The duties of a sponsor,' says a correspondent of mine, 'are not very well defined,' but those which I look for from you, for my now really expected little one, are clearly defined in my own mind, and are such as I am bold enough to reckon upon from your ^kindness^. The truth is you have ever shewn such a splendid friendship toward me & mine, something so much more than mere lip-civility or even slight though genuine goodwill, such as the majority of our pleasant friends & acquaintances afford us, that I flatter myself you will view a child of mine with a certain degree of favour & partiality for my sake, (indeed I perhaps may add, for its father's & grandmother's sakes) and the value of a real partiality from a person of worth – in this world of profession, of much speaking & less feeling – I am deeply sensible of. This kindness & interest of feeling is what I would fain secure from you – not merely a little nominal formal religious examination, which as matters now stand in the world is all in that way that sponsors ever do or can perform for their font-children. This interest I really believe you do feel for my Herbert & Edith (it has ever been a pleasure to me to think so -) and for their future brother or sister – if the dear hope is ever to be realized.

I flatter myself you would feel ^it^, whether you were called the little Coleridge's godmama – or simply its mother's Friend. Only it is pleasant to link a name which implies kindness & interest with the thing itself, though perhaps the latter would exist in almost equal degree independently of the former. Still with all these notions on my part, it was somewhat presuming to make the request which we have done to you – and I believe it never would have been made – if my husband had not so warmly taken up my suggestion, as soon as [it was] uttered - & acted on it so quickly: [MS torn] caring to express a wish long entertained. [MS torn] not add a word of all that is in my heart respecting you [MS torn] & your concerns – but must in

my dear Mrs Jones, that I am ever

most affectionately yours

Sara Coleridge.

Our last respects to Mr Jones & to Dr & Mrs Park – it seems an age since we met. My durance has been hard[?] this time - & I pay a good price for the hoped for blessing. Mama is tolerable today. Thanks for the rich bunch from your garden. What should I see of this summer but for the flowery charities of my friends – only the trees and sky viewed from my ~~mind~~ bed out of the window. Would I could hear that your head was free as hers!

Will you give my best respects to Mrs Agnes and Mrs Joanna Baillie? From the latter I lately had two kind notes which I preserve & prize. 10 C. Place. Thursday morning.

1.2g Sara Coleridge to Mrs Henry Moultrie Jones, July 1840
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 10.4-5)

This letter was written shortly after Bertha Fanny Coleridge's death in July 1840. Coleridge thanks Mrs Jones for attending the service and movingly describes the anticipation with which the family had welcomed Bertha Fanny.

My dear Friend,

It gave me pleasure to learn from my dear husband that you were in Church when that consolatory service was read for our departed little one – and I felt soothed by the touching note which I received from you soon afterwards. You have suffered deeply – from the hand of death – within your own family circle – and must feel with us how mercifully our heavenly Father educates us for a better sphere – blessed & glorified by his more intimate presence – not by books only & the instructions of men – but by the events of our lives – especially those bereavements which cast such a gloom on our ^near^ prospects that they compel us to turn our aching eyes upward in search of light <u>from above</u>.

Our sweet little Bertha Fanny, for she <u>was</u> sweet to us, – a precious <u>object</u> of many fond thoughts, and hopes by which love is nourished, – promised to be less like our other children than they are to each other. We fancied that in complexion she would perhaps resemble the dear aunt Fanny whose name she bore – you may imagine what visions we had

of this third darling – of what she was to be in various stages of her babyhood - & childhood & girlhood – how we connected her with Edith & imagined what the elder & younger sister would be to each other, & how prettily they would contrast with each other. Her fate is a happier one than we could have dreamed out – or by our best parental efforts – have secured for her, and we shall be no losers by the sacrifice if we suffer it willingly. Miss Park will perhaps hear of our loss with a regretful interest.

That lady's countenance – her conversation - & her gentle & pious book – all together make me feel that in the main I know her, even after scarce a few hours' intercourse – and that she is worthy to be loved by them who place their love well & wisely.

We send you the 'Table Talker' which I am pretty sure you will find an agreeable book, though you may not accede to all the great variety of opinions on different subjects which he rather lays before his reader. On the subject of Beauty – it does appear to me that Mrs Southey – The Table Talker – and 'The Doctor' are all rather one sided. Pray give out best respects to Dr & Mrs Park. I am very glad to hear that they think of building a little[?] mansion near your present abode.

I inclined much to visit Hampstead this Autumn – I thought of your society being audibly[?] in my mind when I did so – but it is considered better that I should have a greater change of ^air^ & scene[?] completely new scenes around me – and as the move is made for health I must attend to these suggestions I greatly regret leaving mama to solitude, – but as she feels she cannot accompany us without greater discomfort than advantage – I have no course left but the one I am about to adopt for I owe it to my husband and children not to spend another vacation in Regent's Park.

Henry has resumed his project of a fortnight or three weeks abroad;- for a little brisk movement and the wholesome sensoratory excitement of foreign sights and sounds seems almost indispensable for him in his present Law-&-London-weary state. He was affected & distressed by the illness & death of our dear little babe – on whom he had begun to fasten his heart very fiercely – more ^than^ I could have anticipated – attached as he has ever been to his children. Fathers become more tender in their parental affections – I think – the longer they are exercised. Our brother John says, 'I never knew any birth in our family so hailed as little Bertha's was; - our joy was in proportion to our previous anxiety.' I had indeed suffered ^so^ heavily for the sake of this poor little child - (poor as to her lot in this world – though bled in the better land) – that I felt, in the prospect of my loss, as one who had rolled a heavy

stone up a long tedious hill – like Sisyphus of old - & was doomed to see it suddenly rush down again when the steep stony ascent was past & the summit gained. That summit was no secure resting place – though I did fancy for a few days that all was safe. For the darling at first shewed no sign of weakness – she seemed to be filling out & brightening like the growing crescent of the moon till the blight passed over her. but I must dwell no longer on these natural regrets – which however, I trust, are no unchristian repinings. Believe me, dear Mrs Jones, ever most affectionately yours Sara Coleridge

1.2h Sara Coleridge to Mary Pridham, 28 July 1843
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 8.3-9.4)

Written shortly after the arrival of Christabel Rose Coleridge, who was born on 25 May 1843.

Coleridge draws comparisons between Christabel and her deceased infant, Bertha Fanny.

Mr Matthison called here today – very well-spoken & pleasing and haggardly handsome. Certainly the bride elect looks very pale and rather nervous when her wedding is spoken of, dear girl.

Dearest Mary

I fix Tuesday and hope you will at least stay to tea, as early as you like. If Tuesday does not suit do you fix another day.

Nothing but the most extreme pen weariness that you can conceive has prevented me from telling you, with my own paw, my heart-deep sympathy about the precious babe! Nurse is inquiring like a dragon for a good steady babe-guardian for you – but you know that satisfactory nurses are even more difficult to acquire than cooks. Nurse never approved of Fanny Ann for the babe, not thinking her strong and experienced enough. I felt much when I heard that the dear was consigned over to her – but when I saw the infant in her arms was more content – not from approving her as a nurse, but from thinking her charge strong and flourishing. I hope you will get a good nurse soon. Fanny Ann is, I dare say, a very good girl; but I should have not had a moment's peace with her as nurse of a babe of mine. My feelings

about my little Bertha Fanny, which I once thought dead – I now find to have been only dormant. I have thought much of her and felt much, since the arrival of Christabel Rose.

I shall be most glad to see Mr Moultrie. O that I had that strength of mind for which he gives me credit! – but I am a very sad heart-pining widow who feels her irreparable loss daily more and more. This I earnestly say that I always deeply felt Henry's value while I had him – I could scarce feel it more keenly could he be restored to me.

Dear John writes dolefully of his wife – still more dolefully of James & sweet Fanny. He seems to apprehend that we may have to mourn for her – but I do not give way to any such fear yet – till I hear something more decided. Great weakness is all that I hear of in her at present.

I am too tired to write a line more or comment on D's interesting Keswick letters. Best regards to Mrs Pridham & kind love to Kate [Pridham], & kiss to Kistabel from your attached scrawler sister Sara C.

1.2i Sara Coleridge to Mrs Frederick Denison Maurice, 1843
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 4.10)

This letter is addressed to Anna Barton, the first wife of notable Christian socialist Frederick Denison Maurice. Coleridge informs Anna of the birth of her niece, Christabel Rose Coleridge (Derwent's daughter). She reflects on the loss of Bertha Fanny before noting that 'these lookings back are unwise'.

I have a letter from America which speaks with warm approbation and admiration of Mr Maurice's preface to the 2nd edition of the 'The Kingdom of Christ.'

My dear Mrs Maurice

It was a great pleasure to me to receive your card, and find that you are safe, after all the anxiety of your friends for you; and as soon as I can manage a visit to you I shall do so, though now all my carriage friends are gone or going out of town. I should have written to you yesterday but was laid up with an attack partly of the season, and partly I fear from the sleeping draughts which I am really obliged, every now and then, to take. I have long felt sure

that my poor father, had he submitted to medical management from the first, as I have done, ^would^ have taken, by medical permission and prescription, no small quantity of a certain injuriously helpful drug, which, because he prescribed it to himself, has borne the whole blame with the public at large, of his deranged health. I find, from his letter to Mr Poole, that he began with it, just as I did, from intense pain in the face, and that precisely the same dose which relieved me from the same malady, removed the torture from him. I am still weak, but less disordered than yesterday.

I hope your baby [Charles Edmund Maurice] will thrive as my sister Mary's appears to have done. The little Christabel is indeed a sweet fatling, sleek as the sleekest of calves that ever was served up at a merry-making. She makes me sigh again for my poor little Bertha, who was taken from me so soon after she had been given, contrary to all expectation; for her seeing the light was more than I had dared to hope beforehand. I think of her now with fresh regret. But these lookings back are unwise. I must try to look onward & upward; – beyond the grave, not into it. My best respects to Mr Maurice and to Mr French, if he is still with you my respects and thanks for the interesting poems he gave me. Believe me dear Mrs Maurice, very truly yours Sara Coleridge.

1.2j Sara Coleridge to John Taylor Coleridge, 26 September 1845

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 7.3-8.1)

This letter was written at the time of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's death. Coleridge expresses remorse and a longing to 'join' the dead. She explains the circumstances of her mother's death and provides a description of her remains. Coleridge also discusses plans for the funeral.

My dearest John

Thank you for your most kind letter – my soul is indeed very very sorrowful – I will not say unto death. Indeed those are our blessed Saviour's words & I ought not to venture to repeat them – though I seem scarce able to use any others. The death-silence is awful. I had to think of her every minute in the day – to be always on my guard against noise – and she was one

that made herself felt – dear creature! – every hour in the day. I shall never be so missed by anyone – my life is so much stiller & more to myself.

It may seem strange to you that this stroke should be so sudden to me – but so it is – I had a strong impression that she would live 5 or 6 years longer at least. The medical men were always informing this notion in me. I saw a change in her during the last two years & more change this summer, but she was so alive to all things that my imagination deceived me[.] I could not connect the notion of approaching death with her.

I feel more than ever the longing to go & join them that are gone – but for my children – But the greatest tie to earth is gone from me – for even the children could do better without me than she could have done.

It does seem strange! – I was away but two weeks this summer – & ^that^ in one of those it should have happened! I cannot but regret that I did not spend the last week beside her – but it was a mercy – that nurse did not recall me as I was away – under the circumstances. That would have terrified her & as Derwent says, we should never have known that the agitation did not hasten her death. All that Nurse tells me of her last days is soothing – she wrote too courteously, thankful for Nurse's devotion to her & speaking even of Caroline's desire to please her. She had said to me as I was going away, 'This is the last time you must leave me,' I said, 'If you are in the least ill, pray let me know & I shall return directly.' I knew it would only vex her to give up the visit then. She wrote to me on Sunday & Monday spoke of being very poorly – but it seemed to me only as she had been before – ^ I felt very anxious however to be at home, as I wrote to beg she would see Mr Newton – I used to write to her every day except one, I think, when Edith wrote. In her second letter about her poorliness, she said she did not mean to send for Mr Newton. This however was done on the Tuesday – & Mr Newton saw no material change in her & wondered that Nurse was alarmed. She was not in the least alarmed herself.

I always looked forward to nursing her through a long last illness. I know not how it was – I could never help looking forward to it with a sort of satisfaction. I had dreamed about it – according to the usual way of my mind – & cut it out in fancy all in my own way. She was to waste away gradually without much suffering – & to become more & more placid in spirit and filled, upon earth, with the anticipation of heavenly things. I thought too that this would help to prepare me my for change. Now I seem as if a long cherished prospect had been snatched away from me. I thank God I was not thus suddenly separated from Henry. My

dear mother, Henry, & Fanny – how large a portion of my heart & mind did they occupy – two of them for 20 years – the other all my life!

Children cannot fill their place – though they are much – very much and give affection & Edward's & Derwent's are more precious than I can express. But my mother connected me with all my past life. What a host of common remembrances thoughts & feelings of long and gradual growth perishes with her! There is little comfort to me in looking at the dear remains. That is not the face I ever saw in her – no – in her deathiest looking – wannest moments – then there was life – now there is nothing but death – it is not even her body it is mere clay. The mouth too disturbs me. Henry's mouth was beautified in death – & though it was but a mask that I looked at still it was one full of harmony & beauty. All the upper part of my mother's face is sweet too. I was about to write to you again ere the stroke came – though not about anything urgent or particular.

As to attendance at the Funeral – of course if you can come we shall be glad – it would be a comfort afterwards to think of marks of affectionate respect having been shewn her on the last occasion – and you were so much to her – had been for so many years – & were always so specially agreeable to her in manner not to mention all her deeper feeling of respect & affection – that it would be fortunate if it could so be – but your first duty is with James – & to the living sufferer. What you say of our dear niece is very melancholy – I had thought there was a fuller hope about her. I have had very kind letters from James – Joanna & the Bishop – the last very affectionately offers to come up – if I wish it. He says, 'we (you & he) are most anxious to consult your wishes & shew every respect in our power to our dear aunt's & your dear mother's memory.' Now will you say for me to him what you think I had best say. It is very kind in him – I always deeply regretted him not attending my Father's Funeral – which he wished to do. I should not like to keep him to this offer – if you think he would be glad to be excised – of course the respect to my mother's memory would gratify me. We have asked no one to attend out of the family. Derwent had ordered conveyances enough[?] for my self & him & the children & Nurse & Edward & Harry – should they be able to come - & Mary Derwent – Mrs Henry Jones would have wished I dare say ^to attend^ but she was out of town. Writing is a great effort to me now – will you tell William with my love and thanks that I wish to write to him but do not feel able. My mother's old friends are all either gone or not near at hand – Mrs Jones was affectionately attached to her though not a very old friend.

Derwent to whom I have just sent your letter, will rejoice that there is a chance of your coming and feel much pleased by William's offer.

As for Hartley – I have begged Derwent to come to talk with me about him as soon as possible. We did not think of his coming, – strange to say. The Funeral is at present fixed for Tuesday next 11 o clock. To meet Hartley at this time after such a separation as ours – will be very very much against me. He was so dreadfully agitated when he first met Derwent & saw the change in him. He will be far worse when he sees me who am still more changed – and then the anxiety about what he will do afterwards! – And then he has so often slipped aside – when he was expected to attend at mournful or happy occasions in the family. But if he wishes to come of course we must encourage it. Mr & Mrs Wordsworth have always strongly urged us never to induce him to come to London. Still it is very difficult and very painful not to do so.

Dear Edith is much depressed. There is Herbert a-moving. He writes as I could wish & seems much more impressed than formerly as might be expected from his added years. Nurse is as much affected as if she were a near relation. She has suffered greatly from the anxiety & the shock at last. I slept somewhat last night. I am not taking my own morphine – but a sedative under Mr Newton's directions.

Give my kind love to all around you and to Dear Frank.

Ever your affectionate sister

Sara Coleridge.

10 C Place Friday

Sep 26 1845

1.2k Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge, 27 September 1845
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 5.1-5.3)

Another letter regarding the death of Sarah Fricker Coleridge. She mentions plans for the funeral service and goes into detail about her mother's corpse. Coleridge was disturbed by the sight of her mother's remains, particularly the mouth.

My dear Brother

Among the letters of today is one from Eton saying that Edward will assuredly come & will string himself up to read the service if it would be wished. I thought fit to accept this offer, which is affectionately made & have written to Jackson to that effect. I told Edward he might still draw back if he felt that he should not like to do it. But I told Jackson that if he did not hear to the contrary by two o clock on Monday he must conclude it would be so & arrange accordingly.

I slept heavily last night without morphine – and am going on today with only my porter. Yesterday evening I took a third part of a glass of wine at a time when I was feeling very faint & sinking. Of course I am very low and sad. The blow is much more unexpected & has taken me by surprise more than the other heavy one. Indeed when Henry's illness first came on I was not unprepared for it. I had been repressing a thousand forebodings.

The men are coming to close up the remains – I have not looked at them today – as there is a change in the mouth. This hand with which I am writing will lie beside them ere many years are gone. I should be glad to see both my children happily married & settled with simple lives & promising prospects. Then I should gladly say nune dimittis, as I now feel and imagine. I think I shall not live longer than my Father, who was 11 years younger than our mother when he departed.

I feel even now that my life is worth far less – as I said to John, than it was last week[.] Yours is very precious on public & private accounts May it long be spared & your fortunes greatly improved is the prayer of your affectionate sister Sara Coleridge Dear Miss Trevenen will feel this loss.

1.2l Sara Coleridge to Mary Pridham, September 1845
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 8.3-9.4)

A third letter regarding the death of Sarah Fricker Coleridge. Coleridge discusses 'business' pertaining to securing mourning outfits, informing friends of the death, and a 'book bequest' to Derwent Moultrie Coleridge (Derwent's eldest son). Once again, she expresses discomfort at the sight of Fricker Coleridge's body.

Dearest Mary

Will Derwent be good enough to announce our beloved mother's death to Dr Southey J.R.L/Hartley St Cavendish Square. She was ever fond of him & had pleasant remembrances of his good natured attentions to her at Keswick. She used to call him Harry. When I last saw him he said he must come & have a long chat with her. I think he never found ^time^ to do so but he had done so not long before & sent his son Charles to call on her.

I have given Miss Chare your address. She is anxious for your business but will find it difficult to despatch both our works ^on this occasion^– However I dare say she will manage. I can recommend her strongly – she is so accurate & has faultless manners.

Nurse has reminded me of mama's desk. I knew there must be some expository of her cash ^but cannot recollect what.^– I will open it with Derwent as soon as he can come.

One thing I have to say about the book bequest for Dervy [Derwent Moultrie Coleridge]. What I should prefer – if it were the same thing to you, would be to get him the works of Bishop Bull – as my mother at my suggestion intended, or any other divine that Derwent might prefer handsomely bound in Morocco or in Russia, paying for it with money mama may have left (the amount of which a check any more than 12 sovereigns & shillings you saw to dy) I do not however know and give that to Derwent as her legacy. The Pictorial Bible is a book I care not for in itself – but I have often seen it in her hands – seen it of a Sunday before her thin apron[?] with it you have not. Herbert too has seen this & would value it on that account. Any of her little brooches except the two with Henry's & her own hair or any of her other articles that have been about her person – you can have to remind you of her more especially. But still – if ^you^ do not like me to draw back from what I said about the Bible I will not & you shall be welcome to it.

I fear the dear remains must be fastened up tomorrow. I went in to see them this evening. They are not the least like her own face to me. In her wannest deathiest look she was far far different. I feel that what I see is not even her body. It is mere clay.

I feel now more than ever the longing to go & follow those that are gone –

But for my children.—

God Help you & your attached sister Sara.

1.2m Sara Coleridge to Isabella Fenwick, 1 October 1845
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 10.2-3)

Sara Coleridge wrote this letter a week after the death of Sarah Fricker Coleridge. It is addressed to Isabella Fenwick, a close friend of the Wordsworth and Coleridge families. Coleridge describes the circumstances of her mother's death, which came as a 'sudden shock' to the family. She expresses regret at having been absent in Eton at the time, telling Fenwick that she 'looked forward' to nursing her mother.

My dear Miss Fenwick

Your most kind letter was very soothing to me - & we were much obliged by your true kindness in reporting to us of Hartley, which took a weight from Derwent's mind. I feel exhausted and shattered – at first I slept heavily from a new sedative and the heavy sorrow of the day – but now I cannot sleep.

This has come upon me as a most <u>sudden shock</u> & leaves my mind in a more distressed state than I ever before experienced. My husband contributed more to my positive happiness – my conscious enjoyment. He was sunshine to me when he came & great was the gloom of his withdrawal – but he left me to myself for hours in the day. But my dear mother from my first infant years to the last of my sad widowhood was ever with me. She is associated with every hour of every day and every one of the goings of life. Whatever I said did or looked, whatever I ate drank or put on whatever ailed me, or touched me in mind or body – she was ever concerned in it. She was so <u>alive</u> to every external thing to the last moment of her existence – that though I now feel what symptoms of approaching dissolution there were in her. I never did associate the idea of real actual death with her, & the medical men from time to time encouraged me in thinking that she would live many years longer. When I heard of her death I was as little expecting it as I was my own. Then to come back & see only her remains! It was not her <u>face</u> I saw. In her wannest worst looks she was far different – she was all <u>mobility</u> - & that was fixed & moveless.

I had been looking forward to nursing her through a long & gradual decline. I thought that this would be a time of spiritual comfort & improvement to us both. Now I feel as if half

my duties & interests in life were cut off. I do not seem to myself worth one half of what I was worth a fortnight ago. But I had a thousand things to say to her. ^God's will be done!^ Much to make up for. To do better by her than I had ever done before. I felt at Eton that all my avocations the attending to her was the most sacred & had resolved to attend better than ever before. I cannot tell you how awful is this death-silence. The first thing in the morning – the last thing at night – was I thinking of her hearing her & often being anxious & uneasy on her account. Alas! to have that back again.

I have a letter written by her the night before she died. She had no anticipation whatsoever – only a general sense that as she was old & infirm there could not be very long. But when Mr Green 3 weeks ago said she had an 'admissible pulse' she feared she might live too long & be a burden to all around her! I am exhausted & shattered – O I told you of my state before.

Yesterday we laid her in the grave beside my father & husband. John & William (the late Bishop of Barbados) came up from Ottery to attend. Edward read the service – we were ten at the grave beside the hired mourners. I feel a longing to join those that are gone but my children will want me for some years to come. But for them I could well be spared now –^Nurse alone apprehended danger on the Tuesday. The doctor did not.^

My friends toy to make me leave home or to have some one here – but I cannot bear that. The children & nurse are all the company I want. I shall never cease regretting that I did not spend the last week with her. But to recall me – against her wish – unexpectant as she was of death – would never have done. I am thankful that Nurse was with her & constantly by her side all that week. If she could have known the tears that kind & faithful creature was to shed at her death it would have pleased her. Nurse always bursts into tears, when she tells me of my mother's kissing her hand lately after she had carefully dressed her upstairs.

Mr Green saw her in one of her breathless fits – yet seemed to see no danger. I have promised the medical man to tie up my arm, the wrist of which is swollen & inflamed - & not write at present.

I would scrawl this letter, which you will scarce decipher I fear. I am yours very affectionately & faithfully Sara Coleridge

10 C Place

Oct 1

We have given £20 to St Augustines in memory of our dear mother. It was money she had left. I found it in her desk where I looked by D's [MS obscured] to see if she had left any directions about her funeral.

1.2n Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge, c. April 1852
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 5.1-5.3)

Dated a few weeks before her death. This letter is placed inside a paper cover, on which is written, 'Mrs H.N.C. to D.C. 1852/Her approaching death'. This is the last known item of Derwent's correspondence with Coleridge.

Dearest Derwent

Today I am much more ill, faint, and low than I have ever been before. The drain at this time is profuse & though some things in the tumour are going on <u>well</u> and if I could stand the discharge a while there might be improvement. I begin to fear it will go hard with me. Mr Newton will examine tomorrow.

God bless you dearest brother and your dear wife and children. Oh! this dreadful faintness & sinking! I had a quiet night.

If the drain does not diminish & I continue to worsen my work is done. I am <u>much</u> worse today than ever before. Oh my dear dear children! Must I leave you so soon! God's will be done!

Dear d I had thought of adding the date of my Father's birth to the Preface. But dear Derwent I am dying. I feel it. I am quite different today from any other day I cannot eat <u>Do not come</u> to see me Derwent. I cannot bear it. Oh what will be the end of this?

Appendix 1.3 Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge's Death, July 1840
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.5)

The ‘Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge’s Death’ is written on four pieces of paper. It chronicles Bertha’s illness, death, and the family’s previous hopes for their ‘third darling’. It movingly describes Henry Nelson Coleridge’s grief. Like the ‘Book of Mourning’, the ‘Journal of Bertha Fanny Coleridge’s Death’ is interested in the spiritual and material implications of death.

B.F.C. Journal

Sat 25 – Dear Baby after a long deep sleep about 12 o clock woke in a sort of fit. Mama came running for [MS obscured]. I felt at once that we had small chance of saving the darling. She revived a little – but we thought fit to send for D’s chief curate – who baptized her by the name of Bertha Fanny. Mr Painter had been sent for first. I communicated about what had passed to H.N.C. by note by Mr Cross. Mr Painter came in the afternoon. Said that baby was very languid – that it had the thromb – from languor of circulation & that little could be done in such cases. ^she had revived for the present – but he gave little hope.^ however an ingestion was tried of gruel. In the evening about 10 she sucked & brought up the milk – but sucked again & did not bring it up. In short we had some little hope, & Mr P. did not discourage it. In the night she had another fit – revived again. In the morning about 10 or 11 Henry who had been watching during the night came in saying ‘She is gone!’ but again she rallied – I saw her about 11 in the morning. She was shrunk[?] & looked blue – but ever & anon opened or half opened her eyes which were large bright & dark – of some indefinite dark colour a greenish grayish tint presiding in them more than brown – but when wide open they seemed rich & dark & even purplishly. ^like purple violets with dew upon them in the sunshine^. Mrs Sherborne never parted with her out of her arms during her whole illness. The darling continued dossy and fainting on. There appeared to be little suffering since the fainting & the decrease of the little vigour she ever had. Between 7 & 8 Henry said she was losing heat. At 8 o clock I heard him sob hysterically & knew that she was dying. In about 10 minutes Ann told me she had given her last sigh. As Henry said she died away like a breeze. ^ and so – thus faintly <u>faintly</u> tied/To earth – she was set free and died. Pain – the appanage of earth could gain no firm grasp of one so faintly faintly tied to it.^ Mr Painter said it was a violent case of thromb from languid circulation. She was doubtless born too soon to meet the demands of growing life. Her mouth & tongue were ulcerated & Mr Painter said her throat &

mouth likely her bowels too. This prevented digestion & caused her inability to suck. There was not much red spottings on her face but some on her feet. Mr P. assured us that the ulceration did not cause suffering. The dear babe was too feeble & unconscious for suffering. Her features & cheeks were very small – her eyes large & full. She had as much hair when born as Herby at a year old. It was of a deep chestnut brown, rather darker I think than mine as a girl. Much darker than Edy's. We thought from the look of her skin that she would not be very fair – but I think she might have been florid & as fair as her papa. She began to look yellowier as soon as turned off & the thrush (no doubt inwardly) commenced. I think she was a little like the picture of Sara C. 8 years old with a doll by Miss Bentham – there were the same small cheeks – little roundish nose narrow regular features & large full eyes. The babe's head was of a pretty shape – with hair low in the poll - & her face was round & small. She was 10 days & 16 hours old at her departure.

Her dear little spirit does or will as I trust, enjoy heavenly bliss in such measure as infinite Benignity & Power assign, with those of her little brother & sister – who breathed still briefer a time in this world of joy & sorrow – Berkeley & Florence – even as her little earthly remains will rest at Hampstead in the same spot of earth.

In the afternoon of Monday 27 I saw the remains of our sweet babe in the bassinet. I was struck with the ^vast^ difference betwixt death & life even in one that seemed to have ^so little life in her^ such a feeble and slight existence. I recalled the face of the dear babe at 3 days old in the morning of which day Mr P. said she was 'quite flourishing' sucking plentifully from the excellent breast of milk which had been provided for her. what visions I had then of her future face – expanded & encircled with red & white & lighted up like a lamp with the strengthening flame of the soul within. Now I seemed to look on a mere mask – the frame of clay which the spirit had gathered together for itself out of this visible tangible world that surrounds us on every side – which meets the world of spirit and as it were touches ^it^ in every part – as the atmosphere ^air^ embraces earth – yet never mingles with it – or passes off into sameness of substance. I was struck too, as in the case of little Emily, with the absence ^of infantine^ expression – or aught that denoted a particular age or any other circumstance relating to the spirit. Except for the size those might have ^been^ the features of a child as old as Edith. I had a consolation in this – it seemed to give to the spirit which had flown from this little perishable shrine – what it abstracted from the shrine itself. True it is that even such a difference may be discerned between the living & dead lamb or bird or kitten or the gay glossy fly that weaves a thousand intricate motions in the enlivening sunshine. But

we know that in the human soul – spirit conscience will reason – are bound up in the same bundle with life – with all that animates and ^that there is a soul of the body as well as a moral & rational spirit and that these both belong indispensably & with indissoluble union^ glorifies our outward & visible body. We know that in some real & pregnant though unimaginable a sense a man is born & to the essence of our humanity – the two poles of our double nature – man dies with the scarce conscious infant. Therefore I rejoice over being the copula – the ~~[MS obscured]~~ unity the result of the departed spirit of my frail little baby – who partook so largely of her poor mother's bodily weakness – I am not shocked or saddened to see how cold how dead – how void of living brightness & glory her little empty tabernacle now shews. All the more for this do I think of her as a blissful living creature – and represent to my imagination the heaven she partakes (for to her time is no more - & she has entered on the eternal now) – by types and bright symbols chosen out of this glorious creation – this glowing outward world – all the more ~~I contrast~~ with that dear little corse which for the sake of the late [MS obscured] we look on tenderly, & deck out daintily, & lay in hallowed mould beside the mortal spoils of ^our^ other little ones nipped still earlier in the bud – do I contrast the spirit of her who was to have been our darling – a third joy of our middle life & comfort of our decline – ~~dwelling on it &~~ picturing ^her^ as a glowing ^joyous^ white winged angel, basking & sporting in bright ^hazy^ sunshine over banks of radiant blossoms whence heavenly fragrance diffuses itself around.

Thursday July 30 1840. Henry & Mrs Sherborne are just departed in a mourning coach with the remains of our sweet babe to place ^them^ in the earth, beside those of our pretty twins, at Hampstead. The spot of their interment has been pointed out as nearby as possible. I saw the darling – or rather the fair clay image of the darling – laid in her white coffin with her little net cap & one of those long sleeved frocks which mama gave me. I thought her extremely like my own childish face – the same full eyes small face & features – but a higher better forehead - & a deeper & better shaped head, with longer & more taper fingers. My brother Derwent had arranged to attend the funeral & it was a disappointment to us all that he was obliged to forego his intent, being called upon to meet at half past 10 ^the^ Father of an intended pupil, & to settle matters ^of some complexity^ relative to his charge. --- 'The Lord giveth & the Lord hath taken away –' The loss is ours, the gain hers – 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!'

The dear babe was buried on the 30th the day when she (probably) would have been born had she completed the 9 months. I think she was a fortnight before her time.

Appendix 1.4 From Sara Coleridge's 'Book of Mourning' (1843-1851)
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.1)

Sara Coleridge began her 'Book of Mourning' on 17 January 1843, six days before the death of Henry Nelson Coleridge. It consists of two 'volumes': the first volume is dated from 1843 to 1849, the second from 1849 to 1851. (The second volume is only a few pages long due to the rapid deterioration of Coleridge's health around this time). Coleridge used the 'Book of Mourning' to record the deaths of friends and family members, as well as to copy verse, hymns, and obituaries.

The longest entries in the 'Book of Mourning' are related to the illnesses and deaths of Henry Nelson Coleridge (d. 1843), Sarah Fricker (d. 1845), and Hartley Coleridge (d. 1849). The transcriptions below are taken from the first volume. This includes a record of Henry Nelson Coleridge's final days and Sarah Fricker's poems on the death of her son Berkeley (d. 1799), which Coleridge copied at the time of Fricker's death.

Tuesday – Jan 17 – 1843

My beloved suffered most severely from a struggle with the phlegm – from 4 o clock in the morning till 9 – or thereabouts. After anodyne tea he became quiet – but hes been very languid all day – This symptom of the phlegm – like his father, has come on during the last 4 or 5 days. He spoke of approaching death today - said he was happy - then again 'I thank God, I am quite tranquil.' He ~~bade~~ ^called^ Herbert – who leaves us today for Eton before 5. To him – told him it was uncertain whether he should ever see him again or no. He said, he cannot see Edith once more. Nurse, while I was dressing came to me and said there was a great change in him. I went down; found him very ill but with no decisive symptoms. He called me to him. & told me that he wished about Derwents debt of 500. He said that he had a security – the money to be paid when young D. is 18. £400 he said his executors shd take. This for the use of his wife & children & remit the other £100. He said this was as much as he

ought to give away finally. Regard for his wife and children must restrain him from doing more. It would be a great relief to Derwent to have no longer to pay the yearly £20 of interest.

Thursday Jan 26 – This day at 10 minutes to one o clock my most beloved and honoured husband breathed his last – James & I sitting beside his bed. So ends the great charm of this world to me – He has made all things bright to me for 20 years – perhaps too bright – it is time that look at the brightness that can never fade. Yesterday evening a violent flush came over him – just after he had desired to have his head lowered & be turned on his side – his cheeks were crimson - & there were two white streaks down each side of his nose. He seemed sleeping & unconscious but breathing hard. I came and read a few prayers by his bed – He joined in them a little, but more in the Lord's prayer. Those were the last words of sense I heard him utter – except yes for the anodyne. I went to [put] my bed clothes on my dressing gown on the night before – came down at 12 – found him asleep & not suffering much. He lay near the door. After staying awhile I went up again. Then I came down about two – Nurse thought him asleep. I came down again at a little past 3 – He had taken the anodyne once - ^He was getting worse – he said yes when asked if he wd take the anodyne^ I went up again for a short time – then came down before 4 – found him bad – The heavy breath & struggle continued to increase – he had taken the anodyne three times & Mama thought it shd be given no more – he had rankled when I was down before I think – and talked of his Z.P. mixing up with him the and receive – 'a traveller like Palgrave' – said over & over again & to Nurse when I was out – he took some tea – this deadly struggle was from 4 to 6 – especially the last hour – I spent the time in prayer outside the door - & just within – & then round by the fire. Nurse wished me to go away ^& not witness the last sufferings^ - but I could not bear to do this. I prayed fervently for him out of Paley's book – all the prayers that would – and Andrews: Litany over & over again. Nurse & L. sate beside him & watched. I then prayed earnestly that he might have no such struggle to go through again – not to God – leaving it to Him – but in my wishes. When I asked him if he sent any message to Herby – he said – under the influence of the anodyne partly – Give him my love & regard. A good while ago, when John said he had written to the Bp of Exeter about a canticle to be changed – which I had pointed out to him - Edward being present – he seemed desirous that E. shd know that I had made the discovery - & said Well. I do think there was some acuteness to my wife discovering that. So ends my record. O may my life in heaven begin. May I live so as to join him close!

I must finish my journey alone – 40 years are gone – The first 20 years – all is gone that made it charm of that time – The many friends of that period swept away! Now the partner of my heart for 20 years my dear husband for 13 years last September is departed – I was 40 years old this Christmas. Perhaps I may live another 20 years or more may that be a holier & heavenlier life, as much more so than the past as it will be less attended with earthly pleasures & gratifications.

Dear dear afflicted creature! I kissed his beloved face – over & over again in his unconscious last hours. James said it wd not tease him. I moistened his mouth two or three times with kisses & rum. He had half opened his eyes once before James came. Kissed his arms about at times. Sometimes in the night I [MS obscured] I undid his neck button as he moved about to do it. How dying A dear creature looked when he was washed yesterday. Yet that wasted languished face was far other than the very face of death.

Nurse says he eyed my dress so on the day of the Communion. James & I both closed his eyes. I afterward held up the chin that it might not fall & cut locks of hair off the beloved head & breast.

Jan 27 – I saw the remains this morning in the coffin. The face looked beautiful with a placid smilingness. The dark colour which succeeded the marble whiteness of death was gone - & so was the narrow look that came on when he first expired & completely altered the aspect. It now looked on like our twins & Bertha Fanny – so sweet. I saw John - & after a struggle consented to an examination – understanding that all would be as before afterwards. This is very painful – but right. Saw D. & M/R. They thought the face of the departed beautiful. D. said he knew not he had so handsome a nose. Saw James he told me that quite [sic] portion[?] with my father's remains was impossible – as they were in a promiscuous vault. I said that to have him in the same churchyard was all I desired. After two o clock a heavy black cloud came over me. It seemed as if the prop of my spirits had fallen away - & all was crushed into flatness. I am better now, but very low. I am resigned to the blackness & desolation of feeling that I must go through. God's will be done in all things. The Lord hath given & the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

The first person I saw this morning was Miss Chare about widow's mourning.

Tuesday Feb 2 1843 The day of the Funeral

After a sleepless night I prepared to attend the funeral. By ten o clock all were assembled in the drawing room – Soon after 11 we set off. ^Herbert came about 10 – brought by Uncle John^ I was in the first carriage with Herbert Nurse and E. Then the four brothers in the next – then in the last Brother Patteson Mr May & Mr Green. ^10 – John Frank Edward Derwent. James was at Highgate before –^ I had taken a strong dose of anodyne before my departure. The sight of the hearse with its black plumes – the tolling of the bell as we entered the churchyard – all the signs & honours of death gratified me. I seemed literally to hunger & thirst for such outward remembrances. I prized the day as the last which could be thus dedicated to my lost treasure in this world. I could not for worlds have allowed my friends to carry away the remains & not have attended them to the grave myself – not have seen the last of them ^Edy was ill in whooping cough. Miles came & was with her during the Funeral^

I occupied [the] pew with my companions opposite the reading desk – James performed the service. He read audibly and only seemed to falter a little at the conclusion of the chapter from Corinthians The weather had been very adverse, though the day before was so fine, all but incessant rain. We had to re-enter the carriages & proceed strolly to the Churchyard, which seemed a long way off, arrived then I followed the coffin to the grave. Saw James opposite me on the other side of that walled pit which is hereafter to receive my own remains with those of my dear mother. I heard and joined in the words which James was uttering – saw the coffin lowered into the tomb. When the voice of the minister ceased I drew nearer to the brink of the grave and looked down fixedly into my future home – the receptacle that all that earth will hold of me a few years hence. James came forward – as I retired from the grave with him I heard a voice of weeping – I ^had^ shed ^some^ tears but had not wept aloud myself. I bade James farewell – as he put me into the carriage. Our journey home seemed quick. I felt strong for some hours afterwards – saw John & Frank & talked with Derwent. That evening however I was seized with shiverings – my cough became convulsive. From that time to this have been suffering greatly – my cold in the head has for some days been gone – but my cough remains. I have suffered sadly from want of sleep. Last night I slept better & the night before too. I am consequently stronger today – but still very weak – with backache – perspirations at night – continual slight nausea &c. D & M. have been here today & think me better than they expected to find me. My health will perhaps gradually return – my happiness, such as it <u>was</u>, is gone forever. But I have begun at least to set my affections on things close – & I console myself with bringing it home to my thoughts – that the blessing taken from me I <u>could</u> not expect but to part with after a few years – and that the

loss of it now has turned my thoughts and wishes toward a better world with an earnestness which nothing, but such a deprivation could have produced, ^and this^ before I have lost my full powers of mind whereby to make my peace with God & prepare myself for that better world – while I am yet a sojourner here.

Our dear mother no more anticipated her death than I did for her. She had written an account of her being very poorly on Sunday – & meaning to send for Mr Newton if not better – I felt anxious to be at home but still did not propose shortening my visit. I thought this would only vex her & that she was only poorly as I had seen her very very often before. She wrote again on Monday saying that she was still poorly – though she had thought her health better. This was her last letter to me I received it on Tuesday – I wondered at not receiving a note about her state on Wednesday morning – but thought I should receive one at 12 o clock – soon after that time my brother arrived with the tidings of her departure ^which took place a few minutes after 8 on Wednesday morning Sep 24.^ Dear dear mother! I shall be with you long, I trust, ere I am of your age. She was 75 some day this month – had just entered her 76th year – Thus she was more than 12 years older than my father when he died & survived him ten years. She could not have had any consciousness of her approaching death ^or not more than a []^. Nurse looked in – saw her washing – she gave Nurse leave to go downstairs for 5 minutes – Had had a better night but looked ghastly, as she had done the day before. Five minutes afterwards Nurse returned & found her falling forward in her chair.

She had finished washing her face & put her cap on since Nurse went down. Nurse ran to her – pulled the bell, which came down in her hand – She left her & ran into the next room to pull the bell, returned & my beloved mother expired in her arms giving three death sobs. Alas! I ever hoped she would die in my arms.

The day before Nurse had insisted in sending for Mr Newton she was alarmed by my mother's looks & increased sufferings with her breath. Mr Newton was here before tea time. My dear mother called up down before him – more lipsom[?] Nurse says - & upright than she had done for months – This was done that he might not think it necessary to be in attendance on her & prescribe things she did not like. She resisted this proposal of flannel. When he was gone she joked – even sang – she said that a wicked thought came into her head when he was examining her, that she wished he could have her pot[?] for a month that he might know what it was. As it is – she said – he does not understand it. 'He knows nothing about it.' But, she added, 'when I looked at his bright innocent eyes – I had a relenting toward him.' On the

Sunday night she talked of religion to Nurse – in her usual strain – said she could not understand or believe all the things that Church people & religion people did. She could not think they knew all they fancied they did about divine things and the world to come[.] That the subject agitates her very much but that she trusted in the mercy of God. She was kind to the last & proposed lending half a sovereign to Mrs Cross expressing compassion for her. Alas – I have now no filial duties to perform.

Saturday Evening Sep 27th – That evening my beloved mother's remains were closed up in the coffin of lead. There had been an oozing from the nose over the mouth. It will not be long – perhaps a shorter time than I now think, ere the hand that writes this record will be mouldering beside the mortal spoils of my parents and my husband in that vault at Highgate. And where shall we be? God alone knows. How little is this life in comparison with eternity! It was most strange, most awful, to see the face that had once been hers in that fixed fearful stillness of death – For she was never still in life – if a grave thought possessed her mind for a moment it was soon chased away. She was all mobility – now fixed like a frozen rivulet. When I die, there will be no such change in me. I am so much stiller.

Sep 29 – New Michaelmas day. My dear mother's coffin brought down into the little dining room and covered with the pall. That table where for 8 or 9 years I have sate by her side – often anxious on her account – anxious to please her – fretted alas sometimes that she was not well pleased. But how soon did she recover from her little displeasures & troubles. It is not quite three years since my husband's coffin occupied that same place. What will come next – How long shall I survive – Let me not seek to know – but feel more than ever how short how uncertain life is –

Sep 30 ^1845^ - Returned from the Funeral. Derwent & I, young D. Herbert Edith & Nurse were in the first coach – Bishop Coleridge, John, Edward & Mary in the second. The day was fine – at my husband's funeral it was raining. I wept more than then – perhaps less supported by anodyne. I had had a sleepless night. Dear Edward read the service. Jackson concluded all as before. They pressed me to go for him – immediately – I told them I could not bear to move at present. Mary D pressed my going to her[.] I paid Edward £20, found in mama's desk for St Augustine's to be given in memory of Sarah relief of S T Coleridge Esquire by her children. John talked of Fanny Coleridge & her precarious condition & of the likelihood that Sophy Martyn may be left a widow. This very day I thought to have ~~returned~~ ^come home^ from Eton and found my dear mother glad at heart of my return – I had many things

treasured up to tell her – and there were many things I had to ask her about the early times of her connexion with my father & Uncle.

Appendix 1.6 From the first page of Sara Coleridge's last known diary, 1851-52

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0866, container 1.3-4)

This is taken from Sara Coleridge's last known diary, dated 1851-52. Coleridge was dying of breast cancer at the time. In it, she ponders on the likelihood of her early demise and her children's futures.

I begin this new vol of my journal in sadness—my health, I fear, failing not to be recovered. God's will be done! I have had more than my share of this Earth's pleasantness, I do not quit under the thought of the sufferings I may have to go thro'—it is the leaving my children, & while I remain here being weak & a burden, unable to help them and give Edith the advantage of my introductions into society and home converse, that tries my spirits. But God's will be done! Shall I live to finish this vol of journal?

Appendix 1.7 Poems

1.7a. Sarah Fricker Coleridge's Berkeley Poems

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0867, container 1.1)

Below are transcriptions of Sarah Fricker Coleridge's poems, 'On the Lamentable Sickness of Little Berkeley during his father's absence in Germany – in 1799' and 'On the death of little Berkeley Coleridge, 11 months old'. Fricker Coleridge struggles to reconcile her faith in God's will with the tragedy of losing an infant.

On the Lamentable Sickness of Little Berkeley during his father's absence in Germany – in 1799.

Ah, why that languid look & panting breath,

Devoted baby, – art thou doomed to death?

Are all my watchings, prayers, & tears in vain?

So late recovered dost thou droop again?

Must the dear hope created by thy smile

Which gave to Oblivion all my care & toil

So soon be dashed? Must my tears flow anew,

And all my cares be centred, love, in you?

Yes, I will watch thee from the morning light,

Till setting sun, and all the long, long night;

Close in my arms my tender babe shall lie,

With David's cares, thy mother's cares shall vie.

While thou art here my prayers shall ascend,

Oh, interpose kind heaven, thy succours lend:

Put forth thy hand, my drooping infant save;

In mercy spare what thou in mercy gave. –

But if his doom is that of David's son;

I from the earth arise, and say, Thy will be done!

On the death of little Berkeley Coleridge, 11 months old.

I pressed thee close to hear they end foretold,

‘As rumoured robberies endear our gold’

Thou’rt gone! My boasted resignation’s fled

My impious wishes snatch thee from the dead.

Lamented Babe! When shall I bless the blow?

When will these bitter tears forget to flow?

Two babes my all – and must I one resign?

Cease, weeping mother – hear the voice divine—!

‘Of such as these heaven’s glorious kingdom is’

Can’st thou not one child yield to Life and Bliss?

The almighty bade him lay his burden down;

His mother, thou wouldst lay it heavier on.

Samuel, —thy dire forebodings are fulfilled:

Death’s clay-cold hand our beauteous boy hath chilled.

Ah, where art thou, unconscious father, where?

Whilst thy poor Sara weeps in sad despair?

S.C.

1799.

1.7b Edith Coleridge, copy of ‘The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past’ by George Beaumont, c. 1852

MS location: The Jerwood Centre at the Wordsworth Trust (WLMS A/ Coleridge, Edith/1 1991.76.2)

Below is a transcription of the poem ‘The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past’. This poem was originally written by George Beaumont, who had sent it in a letter to William Wordsworth upon the death of Beaumont’s mother in 1814. Edith copied this poem on a sheet of paper shortly after Sara Coleridge’s death in 1852.

The dreaded hour is come. Tis come, tis past.
That gentle sigh, dear mother, was thy last
and now diffused among the blest above
glows the pure spirit of maternal love;
Tinged by whose beams my very failings shone
Graced in thy eyes with something not their own
no more affection shall thy fancy cheat;
Or warp thy judgement, when again we meet;
But every action in its native hue
Rise undisguised, and open to thy view.
May every action then, be duly weighed,
Each virtue cherished, & each duty paid;
That when my trembling Soul shall wing her flight
Thro 'deaths' dark valley to the realms of light,
I may expect where no false views beguile
The approving look, and that accustom'd smile.
Blest smile! becoming her sublime abode,
And harbinger of pardon from my God.

Appendix 1.8 Edith Coleridge's Accounts of the Nelson Coleridge Family

1.8a Edith Coleridge, 'Chronology of Events in the Nelson Coleridge Family', c. 1853?
MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0856, container 1.8)

This chronology includes births, deaths, and holidays in the Nelson Coleridge family. I have given the approximate date as 1853 as the final entry goes up to 1852.

1830 H.C. [Herbert Coleridge] born. Oct. 7.

1831 baptyzed [*sic*] Aug. 9th. Sp. Miss T. Grand, of O. Uncle J. and F.

1832 E.C. [Edith Coleridge] born. Mama went to Brighton for change

1833

1834 Birth and death of the Twins.

1835 — — — — — — —

~~1843 Jan. Papa died. Went to Margate with Mama and H. and N. [nurse]. ^to^ Broadstairs with Mama ^& Mrs Farrer^ and Uncle D. [Derwent]. Eton Tunbridge Wells.~~

1836 Papa Mama H. & E. went to Devonshire.

1837 Left Hampstead for Regent's Park.

~~August~~. 1838. – Herne bay. Papa, Mama, Nurse H. and E. Grandmama of Ottery died

H & E. had the measles.

1839 June. First visit to Ramsgate. Nurse. H. and E. Felixstow [*sic*]

1840 June. Second visit to Ramsgate. Bertha Fanny born and died. H. went to school at St. John's Ward.

1841 Dover. [? MS obscured] Papa, Mama, H. and E. Parents went a time in the Low Countries. H. to Eton. ^in Sept.^ E. and nurse home.

1842 E. stayed at Stanley Grove. H. and E. had the whooping cough. H. went into Devonshire.

1843 Jany ^23rd^ Papa died. ^Margate, Broadstairs, T. Wells. ~~Mama and E. went to Broadstairs to stay with Mrs Farrer.~~ Stayed a week with Nurse at Boreham Park Farm.

1844 First visit to Devonshire. H. joined E. – Mama went to Eton. E visited Montague Place, B. Sqr. & St. Mark's in November.

1845 ~~Mama and E. went to Tunbridge Wells.~~ then Mama E. and Uncle D. to Herne bay. to Eton in Sep. Grandmama died.

1846 ~~Mama. H. and E. & Nurse went to Margate.~~

^H.N. medallist^

1847 Mama and E. visited Miss Fenwick at Bath, met Mr and Mrs. W. [Wordsworth]

1848 Newcastle Schol. [?] Row. Eton. Margate. ^F.J.W.^ H. left Eton.

1849 E. to Devonshire. ^Join H. at^ Greenaway. then join Mama and Nurse at Herne bay.

1850 ^Margate.^ Staffordshire and the Lakes. Morpeth – Mama's illness.

1851 Mama[?]. Miss H. stayed with us and Tittie [Sarah Anne Coleridge]. Great Exhibition – Margate in June. Stayed at Putney P. in Sep. October. H's engagement announced.

1852 Dearest mother's departure. May 3rd. Stayed at St. Mark's till July 11th. Ju. 19th to Devonshire. Return Nov. 12th. ^Putney^ Pattesons stay with in Dec. Norwood. Hackney. Xmas at St Mark's.

1853

1.8b. Edith Coleridge, 'Some Recollections of Henry Nelson Coleridge and his Family, by his Daughter', 1910

MS location: Harry Ransom Center (MS-0856, container 1.1)

Edith Coleridge wrote this biographical account of the Nelson Coleridge family in 1910, at the approximate age of seventy-eight. It charts the childhood, youth, and marriage of Henry Nelson Coleridge, and provides a glimpse into her relationship with Herbert and the personalities of Sara Coleridge and Sarah Fricker.

It is not known whether Edith planned to publish this biographical account; however, in 1887 she had published a similar biographical record of Herbert in volume 11 of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Henry Nelson Coleridge was the fifth son of Colonel James Coleridge, of ^Heath's Court^ Ottery St. Mary, Devon, & was born on the 25th of October 1798 (the year of the Battle of the Nile). He was educated at Eton & King's College, Cambridge, ^where he became [a] Fellow^ ~~where he won~~ ^& won^ the Browne medal for Greek & Latin Odes & for the Greek Ode, in 1821. Afterwards he practiced as a Chancery Barrister, & held chambers in Lincoln's Inn. On September 3rd 1829, he married his cousin Sara Coleridge, daughter of S.T. Coleridge, at Keswick, Cumberland.

Before his marriage he accompanied his cousin William Hart Coleridge, Bishop of Barbadoes [*sic*], on a tour of his Diocese, in 1825; the result of which was an agreeable book, entitled Six Months in the West Indies. Unfortunately he thought proper to write a rather coxcombical Preface, in which he made fun of the medicines-chest of his 'Aunt Lucy' (Aunt Luke, Mrs Luke Herman Coleridge) which was called the 'Cave of Death' by facetious nephews. He was severely reprimanded by his father for 'disrespect to elders' & though he was a man of twenty-seven & earning his own living, he was obliged to suppress the whole edition. I have a copy of this first edition, containing the 'Cave of Death,' 'a brand plucked from the burning'.

In 1834 H.N. Coleridge published an 'Introduction to the Greek Classics,' commonly called 'Coleridge's Homer,' & still considered a standard work on the subject.

_____ But he will be best remembered by his research[?] of the 'Table Talk' of S.T. Coleridge, a delightful book full of wit & wisdom, which does not indeed, represent the mystic utterances of him who has been called 'the most surprising talker in the world;' –but rather those 'islets of the blest & the intelligible, which the Sage of Chelsea hailed as occurring, though too rarely, in the midst of the illimitable sea. But there are more things in heaven & earth than were dreamt of in the Carlylean philosophy!

H.N. Coleridge died on the 26th of January 1843, at 10 Chester Place, Regents Park, of spinal paralysis, after an illness of some months

Herbert was a charming child. When he was little, he was called the 'Rose of Hampstead' from his lovely colour & I thought him the most beautiful boy in the world. Besides being beautiful he was older & wiser than I; & as we grew up together, I became his pupil & his slave. He took up chemistry; & I was found once deep in a treatise on Caloric, a subject which he had ordered me to set up during his absence at Eton. Sciences having advanced since, the forties Caloric is now supposed to be non-existent; so it was rather a wasted study. More to the purpose were lessons in Latin; on which occasions, he kept a store of soft books besides him to throw at me whenever I made a false quantity. –much as Ixion for Ixion. The English are very prone to throw back the accent on the antepenultimate, & say 'sonŏrous' & 'decŏrous' instead of sonorous & decòrous—a thing very painful to the cultivated ear.

In early youth Herbert was less interested in things ecclesiastical than in things philosophical or scientific. When he came home from school for the Easter holidays, his

mother told him he must go to Church one day in Holy Week (we called it Passion Week then) as well as Good Friday; so he chose the Tuesday because it had the shortest Gospel. (There was no shortening or dividing the services in those days) But it was very different with him in later life, especially during his last illness. Then the ministrations of his excellent parish clergyman were found most acceptable.

My father always took a great deal of notice of his children, & was ~~fond~~ fond of proving us with hard questions. Once he tried me with the old nursery puzzle 'which is heaviest, a pound of feathers or a handful of lead?' To which I replied, with secure confidence, 'a pound of lead'—& could not understand why Papa laughed! But another time he asked me, 'why have we any right to kill animals for food?' and I answered, after a moment's consideration, 'Because God said to Noah that we might'; which was accepted ~~my~~ my puny[?] Scriptural knowledge being found to be better than my logic. (my mother's teaching was simple & direct, not in this Socratic style)

No likeness exists of my father, for photography was not in his day, & he was never rich enough to sit to an artist for his picture. He was not such a fine man as his younger brother Edward, the manly & gallant Lower Master of Eton so popular with his pupils, who delighted in the candour of my tutor, when he was approached (by the more advanced among them) with some knotty problem of Greek scholarship, & said, 'I must ask Hemsley; he will know.' Nor was he so handsome in feature as his elder brother Frank, most beloved of the family, who seemed a true fulfilment of the old Birthday Rhyme—

'Fair and wise and good and gay

Is the child that is born on Christmas day.'

But he had a most animated & intellectual countenance, crowned with a crest of snow white hair (it turned white after an illness, when he was quite young) & bright brown eyes, which sparkled with merriment, when he was telling some good story which 'set the table in a roar.' I remember him so, when I was a little girl & came down to dessert after a ~~dining~~ dinner party, & saw Papa tapping his snuff box. He was about the last person (I should think) who took snuff. I have the snuff box of grey marble, in a cabinet in my drawing room.

My father always took_____

'Grandmama' lived with us. Being a very 'domesticated' person, she taught me needlework, for which my dear mother had no special aptitude, her time being otherwise employed. She

also made me learn the multiplication table by heart, for which I am always grateful to her: for without such elementary knowledge, as that 'ninety-pence is seven and sixpence (learned by rote & not by reason) how should those who have no head for typing ever keep their accounts? It is useful too, to have it well fixed in one's mind, that ~~the capital~~ 'Christiania is the capital of ~~Sweden,~~ ^Norway^, Stockholm is the capital of Sweden, & Warsaw is the capital of Poland'; the latter fact however being of less political importance since order injured[?] in Warsaw in 1831. Laughed at a good many things []

But Grandmama's ~~intercourse with us~~

My father laughed at Magnall's ^teachings^ questions, he

~~Children was not~~ ^were not entirely^ confined to these comparatively dry topics. She read poetry aloud beautifully. One afternoon, when we were alone together in the drawing room, she read me 'The Lay of the Brown Rosarie,' by Miss Browning (who was then Miss Barrett) & I can still remember the fearsome intimations of her voice, when she recited the lines in which the evil spirit ('lost soul of perjured sun') tempts the unhappy Onora into deadly error.

A slight instability of temper, caused partly by the state of her health, was the only drawback to her management of children. But when she died (suddenly, of heart complaint, while we were away on a visit at Eton) we missed her sadly; & there was a great blank in the house which had been enlivened by her cheerful presence.

The French have a delightful word, 'pontifice,' meaning to speak majestically, to lay down the law – to talk 'like a pontiff;' Sara Coleridge never 'pontified,' but talked modestly, & listened courteously as one who wished to hear what others had to say. Personal beauty too had, probably, something to do with this 'bland composure;' & this was always hers, though little traces were left of that youthful bloom, which once at a theatre, caused the whole house to vie at her countenance (my grandmother told me thus.) In a girlish essay, ^unpublished^ entitled the 'Disadvantages of Beauty,' she describes the difficulties which based[?] a beautiful girl maturing into society—especially from jealousy—not the jealousy of the younger women her contemporaries, whom she ever found kind & generous—but the jealousy of their mothers & aunts, who could not bear to see their dear ones eclipsed by a rival's charms. With characteristic naiveté, ~~she~~ Sarar never perceived that no one could possibly write such an essay except from the stand-point of a personal experience!

She was not caressing in manner, nor did she tolerate the demonstrations that might easily have been encouraged in some of us! But this does not imply that she was in the least degree cold or indifferent. Once, when I was taken with some ~~sudden~~ ^childish^ illness, I saw a look of terror in her face; & thought, with a sudden strange turn[?] of awe. 'Does mama care for me ^as much as^ like that?['] Children never realise in the least how dear they are to their parents; & perhaps this is natural enough. 'Nature is a parable of grace; and there is a Parental Love to which we are all childishly insensible.

Conclusion

These things are now too far off for any sadness. And one only thought is

'How grows in Paradise our store.'

E.C.

April 2nd 1910.

2. Godwin-Shelley Family and Circle

2.1a. Charlotte Smith to William Godwin, 7 December 1797
MS location: The Bodelian Library (MS. Abinger c. 3, fols. 109-110)

Charlotte Smith wrote this letter approximately three months after Wollstonecraft's death. She reflects on the recent death of her own daughter, Anna Augusta de Foville, who died in childbirth in 1795. The deaths of Wollstonecraft and Anna Augusta lead Smith to think about the relationship between mothers and daughters.

Dear Sir

I came to Town on Tuesday, & only the perplexities which seem always to pursue me, & which are I suppose irritable when a large family is to be provided for with an uncertain, or with no, income, wd. have prevented my writing to you till now, to say how very glad I shall be to see you—alas!—if it be any relief to know that others are more wretched <u>as</u> wretched was oneself, (but that is none to a mind like yours)—<u>my</u> wounds are all bleeding afresh;—I ought not to say afresh, for never never have they ceas'd to drain my heart of its best blood

since the fatal 23rd of April 1795—and yet I have tears left for the event I shall always deplore as a friend; that of the 10th of Sept. 1797—Is this world indeed govern'd by a benignant an omnipotent being?—why are we here?—There is a sentence I shall never forget in the last work I have ever seen of Mary Wollstonecraft. 'What is existence but a ^painful^ consciousness of wretchedness.' –I have no other consciousness of my identity I think than that I am the same unhappy person who was at barely fifteen, sold to an ideot—& from the Sussex hills, condemn'd to be shut up in a wretched street in the City;—who once had a daughter she adored & who deserved all her fondness; but who now, with many other Children round her—; has nothing!—I should not say so perhaps for I expect by these Ships my eldest Son from India—who tho he has been these twelve years, comes home poor & merely to protect ^his sisters^, perhaps to avenge the injuries his mother has sustained—

Let me know by a line when you can call, as I will be without company—I should have a melancholy pleasure in seeing the two poor little Girls, but neither my mental or bodily strength are equal to a call at no 29 ^Sommers Town^ now—

I am with great regard Dear Sir

Your friend & Servt

2.1b. Margaret King, Holograph Autobiographical Account, April 1818
MS location: The New York Public Library (Pforz MS (S'ANA 0763))

A short autobiographical account written by Margaret King, addressed to her illegitimate daughters Laurette and Nerina. King charts her childhood, marriage to Stephen Moore, Earl of Mountcashel, and elopement with George Tighe. She also reflects on the impact of Wollstonecraft's tutelage, namely the improvement of her 'faults'. King ends her account by providing Laurette and Nerina with information about their half-siblings on the Moore side.

In case Laura & Nerina should be left orphans at an early age it appears right that there should be a written document to give them some idea of their Mother's story. It is for this reason I write the following pages—

Ireland is my native land—My father was Robert King Earl of Kingston, who was married very young to his relation Caroline Fitzgerald. I was the second of their twelve children & being born in that rank of life in which people are too much occupied by frivolous amusements to pay much attention to their offspring I was placed under the care of hirelings from the first moment of my birth—before three years old I was subjected to the discipline of governesses & teachers whose injudicious treatment was very disadvantageous to my temper—As I advanced in years I had various masters (for no expence was spared to make me what is called accomplished) and at a very early age I was enabled to exhibit before my mother's visitors, whose silly praises would probably have injured me ~~much~~ if I had not suffered so much in acquiring the means of obtaining them that they afforded me no pleasure—With this sort of education it is not extraordinary that I should have learnt a little of many things & nothing well—Various circumstances having combined to give me a premature disgust to the follies of dress, equipage & the other usual objects of female vanity, mine was early directed towards mental acquirements & at the age of seventeen I felt more flattered by a compliment to my understanding from an old clergyman than any homage to my beauty from the most fashionable young men of the day. This might have been turned to advantage ^in^ ~~under~~ more favourable circumstances, but the society of my father's house was not calculated to improve my good qualities or correct my faults; and almost the only person of superior merit with whom I had been intimate in my early days was an enthusiastic female who was my governess from fourteen to fifteen years old, for whom I felt an unbounded admiration because her mind appeared more noble & her understanding more cultivated than many others I had known—from the time she left me my chief objects were to correct those faults she had pointed out & to cultivate my understanding as much as possible: my intentions were good but I wanted advice, perhaps more than those who had less exalted views. I was therefore guilty of numerous errors & none greater than that of marrying at nineteen a man whose character was perfectly opposite to mine. Stephen Moore Earl of Mountcashell was about one & twenty, a handsome man with gentle manners & the appearance of an easy temper. His education had been of the meanest sort; his understanding was uncultivated & his mind contracted. He had an aversion to literature, was incapable of comprehending the feelings of a noble spirit & respected nothing but wealth & titles—how he came to think of me for a wife God alone knows—To my shame I confess that I married him with the idea of governing him, the silliest project that ever entered a woman's mind. I soon discovered the impossibility of putting this design into execution; for though stewards, housekeepers, grooms &c. found it very easy to obtain influence over him, the means by

which they acquired this power were such as I could never have deigned to employ. No person was ever worse calculated for such an attempt as I could neither assume the lofty tones of a domineering wife nor the wheedling accents of an humble flatterer. However (after some quarrelling in the beginning) we went on for several years with tolerable tranquility. I nursed my children, lived chiefly in the country & found my principal amusement in books. At length the political disturbances in Ireland, at the same time that they augmented the number of my errors, gave a firmer tone to my character& thus widened the distance between Lord M. & me. My children also being grown old enough to make their education an object of importance in my eyes, that became a constant subject of dispute, as their father (who loved nothing so well as money) could not endure the idea of going to any expence for a purpose which appeared to him so insufficient. I had been about ten years married when Lord M. was persuaded to make an excursion to the continent & I then ceased to lead the retired life to which I had adapted myself in my own country. The more I saw of society & the farther I travelled the more contemptible Lord M.'s character appeared; however though I often wished to be liberated from his company, I loved my children too well to make any positive effort for a separation, which ~~though it~~ had been more than once talked of ~~but never~~ never seriously discussed. I had not happened to meet with any other man to whom I could have wished myself united & therefore though I felt less regard for him every day yet I had not the most distant apprehension of the errors I have since fallen into. Indeed at thirty I considered myself perfectly secure from either inspiring or being inspired with the passion of love.

In the beginning of 1804 a very dull British circle at Rome was rendered interesting to me by the arrival of George William Tighe, a man who would have appeared to advantage in society of a very superior order: it is not therefore extraordinary that I should have distinguished him from the vulgar crowd or that he should have been attracted by the person most capable of appreciating his merit. A combination of circumstances promoted our intimacy & augmented our admiration of each other; neither of us had sufficient resolution to withstand a strong passion & for years we suffered a variety of anxieties & difficulties—Misfortune must ever be the lot of those who transgress the laws of social life—

—In 1805 Lord M. left me in Germany & from that time I have never seen him. The loss of my seven children was one of the most severest punishments of my misconduct, but the reflection that I could never have been of any service to them & the certainty that other people had more influence to obtain for them some degree of education, in a short time

reconciled me to this separation: and the birth of Laurette in 1809 consoled me for the privation of the others. The birth of Nerina in 1815 has added to my stock of comfort as I have the satisfaction of knowing that their ^father^ will give them the best education possible & will not neglect any thing that may be for their advantage—And now that I have competent means of subsistence & that time & misfortunes have corrected many of my faults, I am perfectly satisfied with my lot & hope to pass the remainder of my days with those I love best in the world, in that middle rank of life for which I always sighed when apparently destined to move in a higher sphere—

Pisa—April—1818

—Laura & Nerina have four brothers & three sisters—their brothers are Stephen Moore Lord Kilsworth; the hon.[ble] Robert Moore now a Captain in the Guards; the hon.[ble] Edward George Moore at the University of Cambridge; & the hon.[ble] Richard Francis Stanislas Moore, at present at Westminster school—(Nerina has some resemblance to Robert & Richard)—their sisters are Lady Helena Eleanor, married to Mr Robinson eldest son of Lord Rokeby; Lady Jane Eliza Moore; & Lady Elizabeth Anne Moore who is about five years older than Laurette—of all these the only one with whom I keep up a correspondence & whom I have seen within these ten years is Robert, who is of so amicable a disposition that I shall venture to leave a letter informing him of the existence of Laura & Nerina in case they should ever have occasion to seek for the protection & affection of a brother—It is scarcely necessary for me to add that Laura & Nerina could never expect to be acknowledged by any of their mother's relations—before they read these lines they will be old enough to understand their own situation in life—

2.1c. Jane, Lady Shelley to Helen Moore, c. 1885
MS location: The Bodleian Library (MS Abinger c. 73 119-20)

This letter is addressed to Helen Moore, who wished to write a biography of Mary Shelley. Jane, Lady Shelley presents herself as Mary Shelley's confidant, explaining that 'we never parted from the day of my marriage till that of her death'. She also briefly mentions Mary Cowden Clarke's *Recollections of Writers*, which had appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the 1870s.

Dear Madam

In my husband's absence I have opened your letter to him—I cannot forward it, as he is yachting & may not lie in harbour for some time—The only truthful description of Mrs Shelley that has yet appeared is given by Mrs Cowden Clarke in her 'Recollections of Writers'—There is also another notice of her in the 2nd vol. of a book entitled 'Traits of Characters'—I do not know who is the author of this book it must be some one who knew her well—I came across this quite lately although it must have been written some years ago. I believe a life of Mrs Shelley will appear in another year—by one who did not know her personally—but who had had an opportunity of seeing her papers. I knew her myself better than any one unless it was her husband or her son for we never parted from the day of my marriage till that of her death nearly three years of daily, hourly intercourse. She was the most tender, gentle & noble woman who ever trod this earth.—lovely in mind & person ~~& under her influence~~ with no thought of self—I have no words to say how dear & sacred her memory is to me, nor how great a privilege it has been to know one so true & pure & good—Believe me

Truly yrs

JShelley

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