

Revision essay

[Family](#), [Mother](#)



Revision Essay A lot of literature has been written about motherhood. Wordsworth is a well known English poet who mentions motherhood and female strength in several of his poems, including the Mad Mother, The Thorn, and The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman. This leads some critics to assume that these poems reflect Wordsworth's view of females. Wordsworth portrays women as dependent on motherhood for happiness, yet he also emphasizes female strength. The poem The Mad Mother describes a woman that is going through hard times. She has lost her dignity and status as a wife because her husband has left her. Consequently she is stigmatized as crazy by her community and does not receive support from them. However, despite what she is going through, she is a happy woman because she has her child. She says, " Sweet babe! They say that I am mad / But nay, my heart is far too glad" (11-12) as she sings and rocks her baby. As long as she has her child, this woman seems content and fulfilled. It is clear in the poem that it is motherhood that brings enchantment and good spirits to the woman, and that she is dependent on her child for happiness. While The Mad Mother illustrates the joy of having a child and the happiness women get from motherhood, The Thorn and The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian woman show the sadness associated with the loss of a child. The main character of The Thorn is Martha Ray. Martha is mourning the loss of her child. After losing her child, she is described as " A woman in a scarlet cloak, /And to herself she cries, /Oh misery! Oh misery!/Oh woe is me! Oh misery!" (63-65). Through her deep melancholy, the poem shows the trauma of losing a child. Wordsworth implies in the poem that the woman is in such agony and sorrow because she has lost her only source of happiness, her

motherhood. The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman portrays the same idea. This poem has a stronger indication that women are dependent on motherhood for happiness. It is about another woman who is also in misery because she lost her child who was taken away from her and given to another woman. She describes the loss of her child as her own death, meaning, a part of her has died when she lost her child. For this reason, she says that she can not live anymore or at least not enjoy life. She says " My fire is dead: it knew no pain/ Yet it is dead, and I remain"(10-11). Even though she is alive physically, she dies spiritually. The Thorn and the Complaint of a Forsaken Indian woman both show the pain associated with the separation of a mother and her child. These poems also demonstrate grief that women feel when they lose their children. One may wonder why Wordsworth focused so much on suffering related to mother and child separation. Various critics have suggested that there are different reasons why Wordsworth was obsessed with this issue such as his personal experience. Wordsworth shows mothers having a disproportionately strong need for motherhood possibly inverting or reflecting what was really his own longing for his mother. Danielle Conger (1996) reminds us that " we ought to remember that Wordsworth lost his own mother around the age of eight and that he associates this break with his own poetic development (again, a signal relies upon the mother)"(para. 12). It is conceivable that Wordsworth has been affected deeply by this loss and that in order to cope with it, he adapted this view of women. Conger (1996) furthers this idea, stating " Although he is writing about the relationship between a mother and her infant, Wordsworth emphasizes the mother's dependence upon the male

child rather the infant's dependence upon his mother"(para. 13). Wordsworth could have exaggerated women's need for motherhood to replace his need for mother love. It is likely that Wordsworth fears his own feelings about the loss of his mother and his needs for mother. As a result, he rationalizes this view to himself. In order to distance himself from his own feelings, Wordsworth probably convinces himself that women are dependent on motherhood for happiness and contentment. Some critics argue that Wordsworth's poems are rather based on his reaction to his surroundings than his personal experience. Since Wordsworth lived in a time when slavery went on, he probably witnessed many mothers being forced to depart their children. Therefore, some scholars debate that his poems reflect these events antecedents. Nancy Goslee (2002) " argues that Wordsworth's lyric ballad ' The Mother'- and if to a lesser degree- ' The Thorn' should be read as just such portraits of exiled African mothers"(p. 301). Wordsworth perhaps had negative feelings about witnessing these separations of mother and child. He could have also related their suffering with the loss of child and therefore reasons that motherhood brings happiness to all women. Although a lot of scholars have argued that Wordsworth saw women as incomplete beings whose satisfaction is drawn from motherhood, some critics claimed that Wordsworth did consider female strength. These critics looked at the language that Wordsworth used in his poem to demonstrate female strength. Gillen D'arcy Wood (2004) argues that Wordsworth uses a language that was too " manly" for females to show their strength. Wood says "[a] significant portion of Wordsworth's ' manly' language in the ballads is actually spoken by women- such as the Forsaken Indian Woman"(973). Wood suggests that

the fact that the women in the poems have strong voice shows that they are not helpless, silenced creatures. The way *The Mad Mother* is written and its tone supports the argument that Wordsworth emphasized female strength.

The mad woman promises her child that " Bold as a lion I will be; / And I will always be thy guide /Through hollow snows and rivers wide./I will build an Indian bower; I know/The leaves that make the softest bed (52-53).

Wordsworth carefully chose language words such as bold and guide that were associated with male strength to describe what this woman is able to do. At his time, only males were known to be doing things that he allows the female, to show her strength. In addition to that he gives her strong voice to exclaim her capabilities. Wood also looks at the structure of the poems to back up his argument that Wordsworth was in favor of female strength. One poem that he considered in particular is *The Complaint of Forsaken Indian Woman*. He says, " Instead of exclamations and other extravagant lyric indices of weeping, the Indian woman's ' complaint' consists of sing-song lines, balladic stanzas and the barest, monosyllabic diction 'My fire is dead: it knew no pain/ Yet it is dead, and I remain/ All stiff with ice the ashes lie;/And they are dead and I will die' (1990). A gloomy tone of the poem would minimize the female's voice, and thus diminish her powers. Therefore, the " sing-song" tone in the poem does not understate the struggle of the suffering woman, but rather gives the sense that, despite the challenges that she is going through, she will endure. Wordsworth reveals his thoughts of women and mother through the poems *The Mad Mother*, *The Thorn*, and *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*. They clearly explain that motherhood is a status that women need in order to satisfy a need. Critics

have debated that this need is to be content as a woman, but Wordsworth strongly advises that this need is to be happy internally. Wordsworth also emphasizes on female strength in these poems. The strength could represent what women are capable of doing such as protecting and caring for their children. However, it is also possible that he was advocating for women by implying that they are capable of accomplishing more than they were allowed to in his time. There are various theories that explain Wordsworth's opinions of women. Some believe that his personal experience influenced his view while others give credit to his environment for his views. Whatever influenced Wordsworth to have these perspectives of woman and motherhood; it seems to be something that he felt strongly about. Works Cited Conger, D. (1996). Wordsworth's women: Female Creative power in Lyrical ballads. Retrieved November 15, 2005, from http://www.mtsn.org.uk/staff/staffpages/cer/wordsworth/creativity_the_feminine.htm Goslee, M., N. (2002). Ethical and aesthetic alterity [Review of the book Slavery and the Romantic Imagination] University of Pennsylvania Press, 299-303 Wordsworth, W.(2002). The Complain of a forsaken Indian woman. In Richey, W., & Robinson, D. (Eds). Lyrical ballads and related writings. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Wordsworth, W.(2002). The Mad Mother. In Richey, W., & Robinson, D. (Eds). Lyrical ballads and related writings. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Wordsworth, W.(2002). The Thorn. In Richey, W., & Robinson, D. (Eds). Lyrical ballads and related writings. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Wood, G., D. (2004). Crying game: Operatic strains in Wordsworth's Lyrical ballads. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 969-1000