

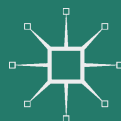
ROMANTIC CHILDHOOD, ROMANTIC HEIRS

REPRODUCTION AND RETROSPECTION, 1820–1850



Beatrice Turner

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT,
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For my own parents, Margot and Ian

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ABBREVIATIONS AND NAMING CONVENTIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

- CCL *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by E.L. Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1956–1971.
- CCW *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by Kathleen Coburn and others. 16 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969–2002.
- E I & II William Godwin Jr. ‘The Executioner: Chapter I.’ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1832): 306–319; ‘The Executioner: Chapter II.’ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (March 1832): 483–495.
- LHC *Letters of Hartley Coleridge*. Edited by G.E. Griggs and E.L. Griggs. London: Oxford University Press 1936.
- LSC *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*. Edited by Edith Coleridge. New York: Harper & Brothers 1874.
- LWD *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*. Edited by E. de Salincourt. 2nd edn. Revised by Chester L. Shaver and others. 6 vols. London: Oxford University Press 1967–1982.
- LWG *The Letters of William Godwin*. Edited by Pamela Clemit. Vol. 1. 1778–1797. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011.
- Maurice Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley *Maurice; or, the Fisher’s Cot*. Edited by Claire Tomalin. London: Viking-Penguin 1998.
- MSW *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*. Edited by Pamela Clemit and Nora Crook. 8 vols. London: Pickering 1996.
- PPW *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*. Edited by Mark Philp and others. 7 vols. London: William Pickering 1993.

- SLL *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*. Edited by Nora Crook. 4 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto 2002.
- Trans.* William Godwin Jr. *Transfusion; or, the Orphans of Unwalden. With a Memoir of his Life and Writings by his Father*. London: John Macrone 1835.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

This study is about authors who share surnames (and first names). To avoid confusion and preserve equity between family members, I refer to Coleridge family members by given names. Thus, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is 'STC' (acknowledging his dislike of 'Samuel' and habit of signing himself 'STC'), Hartley Coleridge is 'Hartley,' and Sara Coleridge is 'Sara'. In this I am guided by other Coleridge family scholars including Nicola Healey and Judith Plotz. I refer to Godwin family members by surname for the same reasons; thus William Godwin is 'Godwin', Mary Wollstonecraft is 'Wollstonecraft', Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley is 'Shelley', and William Godwin Jr is 'Godwin Jr'.

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be a ‘child’ of Romanticism? What regenerative possibilities were available to those who directly inherited, and were produced by, Romantic literature’s intense cultural and psychic investment in the child?

This study views Romantic literature’s discourses of childhood, education, and reproduction through four early nineteenth-century British authors who were uniquely implicated in those discourses. Hartley and Sara Coleridge, children of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and William Godwin Jr, children of William Godwin, shared the predicament of being both ‘real’ and ‘literary’ children. All the children of authors who helped shape culturally definitive Romantic-period ideas about childhood, they wrote back to their fathers in order to understand and to resist the ways in which they were produced by paternal texts which foreclose the possibility of the child’s own regeneration. This study proposes that through this predicament, and their responses to it, the literature of the period between the Romantic and the Victorian periods comes into focus, marked by an anxiety not of influence, but of reproduction. It suggests that one reason why this period has tended to disappear from view lies in the sense of historical and aesthetic difference, and productive failure, which this study uncovers.

Introduction

Father, and Bard Revered! to whom I owe,
Whate'er it may be, my little art of numbers.
'Dedicatory Sonnet to S.T. Coleridge', *Poems* (1833)

So Hartley Coleridge, son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, textual invention and flesh-and-blood child, opens the only volume of his poetry published in his lifetime. Self-deprecating homage and act of filial devotion this may be, but it also renders the legacy of the great Romantic poet as 'little art'. It is an uncomfortable dedication, diminishing Hartley's own art and displacing responsibility for it onto his father. Why is it STC to whom Hartley owes his 'numbers'? Because STC is his father? Or because, as the sonnet continues, he 'Didst meditate the verse' ('Frost at Midnight') which wrote Hartley into poetic being? There is something not quite right about the genealogy here: the inheritance of the mighty 'Father, and Bard revered' is 'little art', and a son who is the unnatural offspring of literature and biology.¹ What Hartley offers back to STC in the dedication is the troubled aftermath of his birth into text as the star of his father's poems, and a paternal and literary inheritance which is imperfectly productive.

Hartley is emblematic, rather than unique. His dedicatory sonnet 'writes back', and it is this gesture which can be used, I argue, to understand the work of a late Romantic generation of 'children', both literal and literary, who inherited problematic discourses of childhood,

inheritance, and reproduction from their parent generation, and found in those discourses a powerful set of metaphors for talking about their own sense of historical and aesthetic difference. This study is about four of these authors. It is about the predicament they share of being doubly cultural and biological Romantic ‘productions’, and the ways in which they articulate a sense of generative or reproductive failure which this predicament initiates. All the children of authors who helped shape culturally definitive Romantic-period constructions of childhood, they wrote back to their fathers in order to investigate and to challenge those discourses they inherited and into which they were written.

Hartley (1796–1849) and Sara Coleridge (1802–52) were children of the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851) and William Godwin Jr. (1803–32) were children of the author and philosopher William Godwin. All four, implicated in their fathers’ texts in various ways, wrote fictions and parental memorials which seek to interrogate those texts and to understand the ways in which they are produced by, and must work against, their paternal inheritance. Because the relationships I am considering are familial as well as literary, the writing-back gesture is always implicitly auto/biographical: Hartley, Sara, Shelley, and Godwin Jr. write back in order to bear witness to the ways in which their fathers’ constructions of childhood, education, and the family, called their specific child-selves into being. It is also a public gesture, however, because in so doing they write back to a culture—the Romantic culture their fathers helped articulate—which was newly and excessively concerned, perhaps above all else, with education and with the figure of the child. The four are children of Romantic-era authors but also children of what we retrospectively call Romanticism. Writing back to a parent generation which is experienced as both monumental and generatively stalled becomes for them a way of working through the predicament of feeling, to modify Shelley, that they are ‘children of a different day’.²

When I say ‘writing back’, I mean this in the same sense as Salman Rushdie’s phrase. In ‘The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance’, he speaks of ‘those whom [English] once colonised [...] carving out large territories within the language for themselves’ and about the need for the language to be ‘remade in other images’; while there is no direct equivalence between the political and cultural processes of decolonisation and the renegotiation of Romantic-period legacies on which this study focuses, this phrase feels right.³ It accurately names a literary act in

common which renegotiates but does not attempt to erase or to rewrite. The four children are, like the postcolonial authors Rushdie names, ‘carving out territories’ in a space structured by the appropriation of linguistic power, and entering into a dialogue with a culturally powerful set of literary discourses through which they have been, I suggest, not merely defined but produced.

This study is, most simply, about the problematic mingling of literary and biological productions, and about the child who seeks to write his- or herself out from a literary text, and writes back to the parent who authored it. It argues that the consequence of the family conflict I have just described is cultural, aesthetic, and intellectual disruption, and that the nebulously defined period in British literature between about 1820 and 1850 is a crucial site of just such a disruption. Victor Nemoianu called the post-1815 period one which registers ‘the social and spiritual shock of the preceding age’, manifested in both a ‘feeling of chaos’ and a therapeutic interest in the family, in empiricism and factual precision (rather than metaphysics), and in history, ‘the divinity of later romanticism’.⁴ All these preoccupations are refracted through the reproductive and retrospective impasses imagined by a generation who sought to interrogate the constellation of Romantic-era discourses which in varying ways set up the child as the philosophical, political, and aesthetic origin of ideal manhood or citizenship. ‘Full well I know – my friends – ye look on me | A living spectre of my Father dead’, wrote Hartley.⁵ This sense that what is generated by his father’s verse is an infertile spectre or reflection as much as productive legacy is emblematic of the preoccupations of a period which has been regarded, as Richard Cronin rightly observes, as ‘a lacuna, a dash’.⁶

My goal in reading these authors and siblings together is to throw into relief a long moment between 1820 and 1850 by attending to the generative anxieties which all four seem to share. I want to counter that perception Cronin identifies, but I also want to think about whether it was in some sense a self-generated one, articulated in texts which are marked by a palpable sense of having ‘come after’ a monumental age. When Shelley wrote of Godwin in 1831 that ‘[h]e stands [...] the monument of the last generation’, she both registered the shadow of a monumental parent and condemned her still-living father to a statutory obsolescence quite at odds with his own belief that he would posthumously instruct successive new generations (*MSW* II: 251). Her ambivalent memorialisation recalls William Hazlitt’s equally ambivalent memorial to a Godwin

who has ‘sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality’.⁷ Both suggest the uncertain spirit of an interstitial age, neither fully Romantic nor Victorian. Hartley, Sara, Shelley, and Godwin Jr. register the divided urge to acknowledge and scrutinise their close implication in their fathers’ texts and the legacies they have inherited, and to assert the spirit of a new age. It is my argument that the extent to which each of the four succeeds, or fails, in breaking away from their fathers provides a way to understand the tenor of a literary period concerned with an anxiety not of influence but of reproduction.

The period between about 1820 and 1840, or sometimes 1850, has been treated as a contested no-man’s land in the ongoing work of defining the Victorian and the Romantic periods. Bits of it are co-opted variously into either, but as a period with its own literary character it seems to always resist full belonging. Joel Faflak and Julia Wright hit the crux of the issue, I think, when they observe that

although P. B. Shelley announced in 1821 that English Literature ‘has arisen as it were from a new birth’ because of the ‘spirit of the age,’ that ‘spirit’ was already being prepared for memorialisation just four years later by writers such as William Hazlitt.⁸

David Higgins and Mark Packer argue that this is a period in which the ‘best and most interesting literature’ took the forms of the review, the sketch, and the essay, a claim which highlights the evaluative, self-conscious, comparative sensibility of an uncertain literary culture.⁹ As Faflak and Wright note, it is a Janus-faced age which is both beginning a process of looking back, memorialising, starting to decide who to remember and who to forget, and looking forwards, eager to declare itself born anew from the ashes of its parents’ generation, and, as I do, they extend this divided and ‘nervous’ age out to 1850.¹⁰

While recognising that labels such as ‘Romantic’ and ‘Victorian’ are the necessarily retrospective work of contemporary criticism, I want to insist that they remain valid, and, further, that close attention to the period’s own sense of lineage and of division reveals the need for such distinctions. I am wary of solutions offered by the disciplinary field of ‘the nineteenth century’ (‘long’ or otherwise); as Tilottama Rajan cautions, it ‘is by no means a neutral chronological term’ and it risks homogenising the literature within its scope through what late twentieth-century criticism sees as a set of Victorian cultural concerns.¹¹ I propose that a

moment in which the real and literary children of Romanticism began to consider how they could live and converse meaningfully with their parents signals a wider preoccupation which is genealogically linked with, but nonetheless distinct from, both Romantic and Victorian cultural and literary sensibilities.

Reading together authors who write back to a conception of childhood guided by high Romantic values of visionary masculine creativity nurtured by the natural landscape, and one shaped by Enlightenment commitments to reason, education, and cultural progress, this study also suggests that these twin inheritances, often critically represented as polarities, are in fact closely intertwined and riven with shared concerns about nature, blood, and education which their heirs interrogate and find wanting. It therefore also participates in the debate which originates, whether in support or opposition, in Ariès' influential and controversial 'discovery of childhood' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹² William McCarthy observes that criticism of children's literature and of literature about children in this period has been 'almost Manichean in its need to dichotomise, and then to extol or damn its dichotomised terms' and, as James Holt McGavran and Jennifer Daniel argue, scholarship which emphasises the perceived social and political disengagement of the Romantic child does not adequately 'recognize how deeply the sense of crisis—of repeated threats to children and childhood across time, class, race, and gender—is embedded in the Romantic concept itself'.¹³ The 'Romantic child' discourse might have become 'dilapidated' under the interrogation of critics such as Mitzi Myers, Andrew O'Malley, and Alan Richardson, who view the politics of Romantic investment in the child with suspicion, but in this study I reassess some of the foundational texts of that discourse, and suggest that Wordsworth's 'We Are Seven' (1798) and the Boy of Winander episode (*The Prelude*, 1805), and Lamb's 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' (1822) are far more engaged with the child's cultural production and displacement into nature than has been acknowledged.¹⁴ In tracing how childhood and family relations are treated by four authors who are writing back to both Romantic and Enlightenment traditions, this study will suggest they in fact approach childhood through a shared set of anxieties about the nature and possibility of cultural and biological reproduction. The Romantic period's intense interest in childhood and education is in this way rooted in one of modernity's most foundational concerns.

The primary texts I consider circulate a set of inter-related terms between them: *biology, blood, inheritance, influence, reproduction, production, education, cultivation*. Underlying them all, however, are *nature* and *culture*, and if *culture* is, as Raymond Williams said, ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’, then *nature* surely has a strong claim as one of the others.¹⁵ Deliberately avoiding theoretical constraints, this study moves freely across and between texts, in order to watch how these two enormous terms shift within productive and reproductive discourses. However, in a study which hinges upon vexed metaphors of reproduction and repetition, and on the struggle to articulate oneself as something other than a production of the father, it will not be surprising that my readings have been enabled by Freud’s theories of the Oedipal complex, of ‘family romances’, in which the child imaginatively replaces their parents with more desired ones, and the work of repetition, remembering, and working through that which has been repressed.

The study focuses on the act of repetition as an expression of psychologically and culturally registered reproductive impasses which render literary creativity problematic for these Romantic children. However, this is not a study of what Harold Bloom, drawing on the idea of the family romance, famously named the ‘anxiety of influence’. While Bloom’s ‘battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites’ will sometimes appear in the background of my readings—most frequently in the case of Hartley—it is a different kind of anxiety that I trace: the anxiety of an irrefutable parenthood and its shadow.¹⁶ I suspect Bloom would say that the authors I consider are not ‘strong’; certainly, they do not belong to the Western canon of male poets in which he is interested. The anxiety his theory sees is ‘the melancholy of the creative mind’s desperate insistence upon priority’ (an insistence which is misguided), but far from insisting on their own originality, Hartley, Sara, Shelley, and Godwin Jr. openly offer up their predicaments as precisely the consequences of their paternal influences.¹⁷

Their texts do not attempt to swallow up those of their fathers, in other words, but to display their own supplementarity to, dependence on, and response to them. In a particular act of calculated self-abnegation, Hartley’s ‘Dedictory Sonnet’ to STC hails his father’s ‘Frost at Midnight’ (1798) as the text which has written his life into being: ‘The prayer was heard: I “wander’d like a breeze”’ (*PHC*, l. 2). The authors this study considers write back to, and out of, blood inheritances they cannot and

do not wish to refuse, in order to reflect upon literary inheritances of which they are both the children and the discourses or texts those inheritances produced. The language of infertility and deformity which appears, in different guises, in the texts of all four authors registers, I think, that they do not write back to their fathers as one author to another, but in a more complicated way which is in part the voice of the creation speaking to its creator. Although I omit discussion of *Frankenstein* (1818) in order to attend to Shelley's less studied texts, its central question of whether it is possible to 'construct' a child haunts the study as a whole. Here is the place to say, also, that despite my wariness about Bloom's figuration of influence, this is nonetheless a study of paternal, and not maternal, influence. This is for the simple reason that, as I hope will become clear, it is fathers to whom Hartley, Sara, Shelley and Godwin Jr. write back, and to whom they specifically direct the sense of crisis they feel.

The structure of this study requires a mention, as it allows me to illustrate how this reproductive anxiety displays itself. All four children follow a trajectory from being written, to rewriting the parent author, and then to rewriting the topos of childhood into which they were written; this near-identical process seems to me a very suggestive model for thinking about this literary moment more broadly. Each chapter, apart from the first, follows the same three-part structure, beginning with a consideration of the ways in which the child is implicated in the father's work. I then explore how the father is memorialised by the child through biography, memorial verse, and editing, with the single exception of Godwin Jr. He died in 1832 and his novel was posthumously published by his father in 1835, with a memoir of Godwin Jr. appended, and in his case I read how Godwin memorialises his son instead. Hartley, Sara, and Shelley all pursued memorialisations of their fathers by different means, and all succeeded to a greater or lesser degree: Hartley and Shelley, for example, both left incomplete and unpublished biographical fragments, while Sara's achievement as *STC*'s editor and defender was to remake her father completely into a respectable Victorian religious philosopher. All three use memorial to interrogate their fathers' legacy as author and as parent, a process Godwin uses in his memoir of his son to perform exactly the same reconsideration of his own earlier parenting. Finally, each author chapter considers how the child writes back to the cultural constructions of childhood, inheritance, and the family through which they found themselves and their paternal relationships produced.

Chapter 2 provides context for the fathers' constructions of childhood and the children's memorialisations and rewriting of childhood in two ways. Firstly, it sketches the rational and Romantic discourses of childhood and the family within which Godwin and STC write, showing how their texts arise out of nominally opposed traditions which in fact share similar concerns. The rational fictions of educationalists such as Anna Letitia Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft may have drawn influence from the Enlightenment's faith in the family's capacity to order itself and train its members, but in their texts the disordering influence of blood ties threatens to destabilise the rational family and expose its abstraction from reality. Similarly, I show how the 'Romantic child', the transcendent and wild child of nature, is also a figure whom the adult narrator self-consciously produces for his own aesthetic pleasure. I then situate Hartley, Sara, and Shelley's memorials of Godwin and STC and the writing-back gesture of all four children within the context of early nineteenth-century debates about the purpose and value of biography, and argue that Hartley, Sara, and Shelley departed from their fathers' understanding of biography as an instructive or celebratory genre. Doing so aligns them with De Quincey, Hazlitt, and Carlyle, who used memorial writing for similarly interrogative purposes. This chapter concludes that the children are part of a literary culture concerned with re-evaluating not only the influence of their parents but also the meaning of the discourses out of which they wrote.

Chapter 3 traces how Hartley's poetry witnesses the consequences of a doubly produced life, as both his father's biological son, and as the quintessential Romantic child written into being in STC's 'Frost at Midnight', 'The Nightingale' (1798), and 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' (1797). I first show how, in a series of sonnets written on the occasion of the birth of his first child, STC interprets his son's arrival as a threat to his poetic fluency, and how the better-known, later poems construct Hartley as ideal when pre-linguistic, ensuring his son is silent, static, and unable to rival his father. Hartley's own poetic corpus of sonnets and occasional poems, as well as his fragmentary biographical sketch, should be understood as a response to this double creation. While in poems such as 'Dedicatory Sonnet' (1833), 'Coleridge the Poet' (1836), and 'Full well I know' (n.d.) Hartley speaks directly to his position as STC's son, his whole output repeats figures of infertility, incompleteness, and abortion, offering up a judgement both on STC's failings as a father and on the necessary sterility of his literary and biological creation. I then

read Hartley's poetry against the Wordsworthian child, and show how Hartley replicates the voice of the Romantic poet who constructs such a figure. In his repeated addresses, poems, and topics, I suggest, Hartley is reproducing the emptied-out figure of the Romantic child, and the cultural forces which produce it.

Hartley's younger sister Sara suffered the opposite childhood fate to her brother: where he is relentlessly textualised by their father as the transcendent philosopher-child, she is a near-total absence from his works and letters. Chapter 4 explores how, actively excluded from the Coleridge-Wordsworth family accounts of ideal childhood, she is instead read as sickly, unacceptably still, and studious. Persistently described as inhumanly beautiful and otherworldly, Sara is instead troped as the embodiment of a feminine Romantic landscape, to be gazed on and written by the male poet whom the Romantic child will father. Like Hartley, she is concerned with unpacking the assumptions that underlie the particular form of Romantic discourse to which her childhood is subjected and, in particular, with insisting that the Romantic child and Romantic poet are not transcendent but immanent, subject to time and the body's changes and decay. As the editor of the second edition of STC's *Biographia Literaria* (1847), she locates a father-daughter relationship, almost completely absent in her childhood, in their shared history of physical illness, reading STC's incomplete output as the product of his diseased body. Sara's poetry, largely unpublished at her death in 1852, and her children's novel *Phantasmion* (1837), figure innocent, timeless childhood as possible only through the earthly suffering of a knowing mother. Her work rewrites Romantic childhood to ground it in time and physicality as a state that will end when the body changes, retrospectively opening up space for herself as a child, but also exposing the deathly timelessness of the gendered Romantic child trope and the adult sacrifice necessary to maintain it.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn from the figure of the Romantic child to the other significant Romantic-period discourse for this study: the family of feeling. The family that makes itself through intellectual and social sympathies, rather than blood relations, is central to the contested ways in which the Godwin-Shelley family imagined itself, and particularly crucial for Godwin's progressivist thought. In both his famous philosophical work, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), and his educational treatise *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners and Literature* (1797), he argues that education, socialisation, and culture continually produce and improve the adult and the family. In the second

half of the study, reading somewhat against the grain of recent criticism on Romantic family authorship, I show how his daughter Shelley and his son Godwin Jr. both question in their fiction the ethics and the emotional and social viability of family ties based on reason, culture, or sympathy.¹⁸

Chapter 5 traces how Godwin's theorised certainty in the constructive power of education is eroded by his fear that he cannot in practice learn how to be a father to his children, and uses this moment of self-doubt to read similar doubts back into *The Enquirer*. Shelley's two memoirs of her father, the 'Memoir' appended to the 1831 reissue of *Caleb Williams*, and the full-length biography she left unfinished, both refuse Godwin's ability to posthumously instruct the next generation, insisting instead that his age of 'theory and enthusiasm' has nothing to say to her own age of empirical knowledge and practice. Her novella *Matilda* (1819), her recently discovered children's story *Maurice; or, the Fisher's Cot* (1820), and her last two novels *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837) restage this conflict between theory and practice, nature and nurture. Godwinian education, in Shelley's fiction, becomes the repetitive and unnatural performance of family roles, the relationship between teacher-fathers and student-daughters is central to the way in which she imagines the transgressive feelings which are cultivated within the family and articulated through education.

Chapter 6 follows how the same debate about the priority of nature or culture is worked out in Godwin Jr's. short story 'The Executioner' (1832) and his novel *Transfusion; or, the Orphans of Uberwalden* (1835). The memoir of Godwin Jr. which Godwin appended to the novel when it was posthumously published sees Godwin rethinking his absolute faith in education, and the nature of family belonging. It is an account of his unsuccessful attempts to educate the wayward Godwin Jr., and is ultimately an ambivalent testimonial to the power of inherited characteristics quite at odds with *The Enquirer*. In this, it responds to his son's two works, both of which are about the primacy of blood over education. Godwin Jr's fiction repeats private anxieties about the extent of his belonging to this family of genius, but it does so through the proto-evolutionary theories of Erasmus Darwin and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and renewed Romantic-period interest in the role of the blood in living organisms. 'The Executioner' and *Transfusion*, I suggest, act out the family romance in replacing the father, but they also reimagine the family in the new language of genetic relatedness, prefiguring Victorian moral anxieties about policing the boundaries of the nuclear family and the human species.

NOTES

1. 'Dedicatory Sonnet to S.T. Coleridge', *Poems of Hartley Coleridge, With a Memoir of his Life by his Brother*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 2nd edn, (London: Moxon, 1851), 1: lines 1–2. All further references to this edition are given following quotations in the text and refer to line numbers unless otherwise specified.
2. In her unfinished biography of Godwin, Shelley writes of the difference between her father's times and hers that '[w]e are children of a calmer day—this is the age of facts and practicabilities—that was the period of theory and enthusiasm' (*Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, ed. Nora Crook, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), 4: 59. All further references to this edition are given following quotations in the text).
3. Salman Rushdie, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', *The Times*, 3 July 1982.
4. Victor Nemoianu, *The Taming of Romanticism: European Literature and the Age of Biedermeier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 14–16; 30. Although Nemoianu is referring primarily to German literature and culture, his argument is applicable to British literature.
5. 'Full well I know—my Friends—ye look on me', *New Poems by Hartley Coleridge, including a selection from his published poetry*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), line 1.
6. Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 2.
7. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. Percival Presland Howe and others, vol. 11, *The Spirit of the Age Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.* (London; Toronto: Dent, 1930–34), 16.
8. Joel Faflak and Julia Wright, eds, introduction to *Nervous Reactions: Victorian Recollections of Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004) 2.
9. Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 6.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Tilottama Rajan, *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), xiv.
12. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). Part One is titled 'The Discovery of Childhood', and this phrase has come to signify the idea that 'childhood', understood as a unique and separate state of human existence, is a cultural and social construction.

13. William McCarthy, 'Mother of All Discourses: Anna Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*', *Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 87; James Holt McGavran and Jennifer Daniel, introduction to *Time of Beauty, Time of Fear: The Romantic Legacy in the Literature of Childhood*, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), xv.
14. Judith Plotz, 'The *Annus Mirabilis* and the Lost Boy: Hartley's Case', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), 184.
15. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87.
16. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence; a Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 11.
17. Bloom, 13.
18. See, for example, Julie Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), and Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), which all argue that the Godwin-Shelley family defined itself through shared intellectual commitments and authorship.

The Family, the Child, and the Memorial

Godwin and STC take the private and make it public. Both search themselves and their families for meditations on childhood, parenthood, and education (or influence), which are released into the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary and intellectual marketplace, and contribute to the ongoing cultural construction of the child. Their children, who are ‘made public’ through this process, respond in kind. I want to begin, therefore, by placing both the act of ‘writing back’ as an auto/biographical form, and the particular constructions the four children are writing back to, within their proper cultural and literary contexts. Godwin and STC’s work belongs to late eighteenth-century and Romantic discourses of nature and education which were both culturally very powerful and far less sharply delineated than criticism has always allowed. The ways in which both authors imagined their own intellectual and personal afterlives, and the ways in which their children chose to memorialise them, meanwhile, must be read through shifting early nineteenth-century theories of literary fame that sought to define the proper relationship between the private and the public individual. Between Godwin and STC’s writing of their children and themselves, and Hartley, Sara, Shelley, and Godwin Jr’s writing back to and re-writing of their fathers, lies a temporal and ethical shift towards a later Romanticism that is sceptical of these discourses of nature and culture in various ways, and sceptical of the possibilities of regeneration and influence that the parent generation seems to promise.