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RICE UNIVERSITY

THE FEMININE CORPUS IN F. J. CHILD'S COLLECTION OF THE ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS

by

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Abstract

The ballads examined here are from F.J. Child’s *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, the authoritative collection of ballads. Though definitions of the ballad vary, most agree that the ballad is an orally transmitted folksong that tells a story. The Child ballad collection has stood a solitary monument from its publication (1882-1894). In it Child brought together from manuscripts and printed sources all of the extant English and Scottish ballads that he regarded as authentic. Though Child’s work itself was groundbreaking, exploring territory marginal to the sort of academic study making up his official duties as professor of English at Harvard, his collection soon became canonical, subjected to critical study as a sub-genre. Perhaps because Child himself died before he could write his essay on what the ballads were and what they meant, since Child’s death, much of the critical work has been an attempt to fill in what was left undone by Child, that is, defining the ballad and analyzing the criteria by which Child made his choices. In more recent times, critical studies of Child’s works have applied psychoanalytic and feminist critiques to selected ballads. Yet, no previous work has examined the relationship of Child himself to his collection. This work sets out to view the Child collection in terms of literary critical theory, showing that Child’s collecting is an act of Lacanian paternity whereby the collector, attracted especially by the bodies of the female characters, is moved to bring all the ballads under his dominion yet is subverted in his desire for dominion as female characters present themselves in terms of “bodytalk.” Chapter one shows Child’s collecting as Lacanian paternity. Chapter two focuses on the presentation of women’s bodies in the ballads. The final chapter shows
that the women characters in selected ballads speak according to what critic Jane Burns terms "bodytalk."
INTRODUCTION

The ballads examined here are from F.J. Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, the authoritative collection of ballads. Though definitions of the ballad vary, most agree that the ballad is an orally transmitted folksong that tells a story. The Child ballad collection has stood a solitary monument from its publication (1882-1894). In it Child brought together from manuscript and printed sources all of the extant English and Scottish ballads that he regarded as authentic. Though Child's work itself was groundbreaking, exploring territory marginal to the sort of academic study making up his official duties as professor of English at Harvard, his collection soon became canonical, subjected to critical study as a sub-genre. Perhaps because Child himself died before he could write his essay on what the ballads were and what they meant, since Child's death, much of the critical work has been an attempt to fill in what was left undone by Child,

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that is, defining the ballad and analyzing the criteria by which Child made his choices. In more recent times, critical studies of Child’s works have applied psychoanalytic feminist critiques to selected ballads. Yet, no previous work has examined the relationship of Child himself to his collection. Following in the footsteps of those works that have applied feminists critiques and psychoanalytical critiques to portions of the ballads, this work sets out to view the entire Child collection in terms of feminist theory and psychoanalytical theory, revealing the relationship of Child to the body of his work. Such an analysis shows Child’s collecting to be an act of Lacanian paternity whereby the collector, attracted especially by the bodies of the female characters, is moved to bring all the ballads under his dominion yet is subverted in his desire for dominion as female characters present themselves in terms of “bodytalk.”

It is the popular ballads contained in Child that G. H. Gerould defines this way, showing the three main constants found in all ballads: “‘A ballad is a folksong that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias’” (Hodgart 11). These ballads are anonymous and impersonal, as Kittredge explains in the introduction to the abridged 1904 edition of the Child ballads:

Not only is the author of a ballad invisible, and so far as the effect which the poem produces on the hearer is concerned, practically non-existent, but the teller of the tale has no role in it . . . . There are no comments or reflections by the narrator. He does not take sides for or against any of the *dramatis personae*. He merely tells what happened and what people said, and he confines the dialogue to its simplest and most inevitable elements. The story exists for its own sake. If it
were possible to conceive a tale as **telling itself**, without the instrumentality of a conscious speaker the ballad would be such a tale. (Sargent and Kittredge x).

Since Kittredge’s time, a number of definitions for ballad have been brought forth, including Hugh Shields’ assertion, which follows in the tradition of Gerould, stating that a ballad is “a song giving a report of fulfilled action . . . tend[ing] strongly to a dramatic purpose” (41).

Some critics, in defining **ballad**, have investigated words that appear related linguistically. Bronson indicates that **ballad** does not have its origins with the dance, despite the fact that the Greeks and Romans have words apparently related linguistically (ix.) Similarly, Evelyn Wells finds that the British **ballad** is not derived from **ballare** (Italian to dance) and, although the ballad may derive some of its rhythmic effects from the dance, it was not danced in Britain (4-5). Wells, moreover, discounts the relationship between **ballad** and **ballade** by citing the nonnarrative nature of the **ballade**, a fourteenth-century lyric.\(^2\)

Bronson, author of *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, reminds that the ballad is not a ballad at all without the **tune**. He goes on to explain that the music controls the verse, making the stanzas normal and of a consistent length with an “uncomplex sentence-structure” based on the musical phrase. The units of thought conform to the four-stress musical phrase typical of Western folk melody (ix-x).

David C. Fowler looks at what produced the ballads in order to formulate a definition. He concludes that the ballad has its origins in the fifteenth century in a combination of metrical romance with folksong (18). In confronting how to define

\(^2\) Wells’ work gives the texts, and tunes, along with commentary, for ballads as they had been sung in the U.S. and Britain between the time of the Child collection’s publication and 1950.
ballad, David Buchan in *The Ballad and the Folk* writes of the difficulty: “Ballads are awkward things. Few literary genres give so much pleasure to so many kinds of people and yet pose such refractory problems for the scholar and critic” (1). Buchan goes on to make a distinction between word-of-mouth and oral, a distinction essential to his argument that the ballads develop through nonliterate oral transmission within regions.

From Buchan one might turn to Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* for help in understanding the distinction Buchan makes. Ong takes into account post-structuralist criticism to argue that the mental processes of nonliterates are fundamentally different from those of literates, with the implication that the productions of nonliterates are fundamentally different, too, allowing for ballads to have originated with nonliterates.

After remarking upon how often ballad scholars note the fact that Child died before he could define the genre, Flemming G. Andersen goes on to say that “The focus of interest has gradually shifted from a classification of the ballad as a poetic subgenre toward an appreciation of ballads as a particular narrative technique, a particular way of telling a story” (20). Seeing the ballad as in flux, not a fixed object, Andersen would have us abandon the project of arriving at the definitive definition for *ballad*.

In looking for trends among the critics who study the ballads, one sees a wide variety of approaches and interests, so varied as to challenge one who seeks to give a coherent overview. Some books stand forth as reliable resources for ballad students. In his *Folklore in English and Scottish Ballads*, Wimberly focuses on what is implicit, not explicit in the ballad, namely the folklore that informs particular ballads (1-2). Wimberly makes the point that understanding the folklore, as the original audience must
have done, makes the ballad experience richer. Willa Muir in *Living with Ballads* traces the ballad through stages of development, beginning at a time before there were ballads per se, that is, with the time of epics such as *Gilgamesh*, what she calls the Underworld of Feeling, and proceeding then through successive stage of the middle ages, northern Scottish Backgrounds, the Reformation and after.

To take in the many articles on ballads, one may, for convenience, view them according to these categories: those dealing with ballad transmission, those pertaining to ballad music, those pertaining to oral sources for the ballads, those pertaining to a particular type of ballad, those about a particular ballad itself, and those that take a psychoanalytical look at the ballads.

Articles dealing with ballad transmission appear to be among the most polemical of those cited here. Among the articles dealing with transmission is David Buchan’s “Oral Tradition and Literary Tradition: The Scottish Ballads,” in which Buchan asserts that ballad composition is formulaic but that literature in its strictest sense is written. In response to several writings of Buchan, Albert B. Friedman presents “The Oral-Formulaic Theory of Balladry—a Re-rebuttal,” in which he calls into question the validity of oral-formulaic composition for ballads and Buchan’s arguments using the theory. In looking at the feature of the ballad known as “incremental repetition” (I place this article in this category with the assumption that some consider incremental repetition to be a feature of transmission.), Nicolaisen shows the difficulty of defining the term and then goes on to show that the repetition known as incremental may not be at all. (One good definition of incremental repetition is Edward MacLeach’s assertion that it is “the constant repetition of a familiar line of verse, with a new element coming as a mild
surprise at the end of each, creating a kind of minor climax, and then the last line that releases tension and resolves it all.”[123]. Assuming the premise that ballads must rely on human memory for their preservation, Wanda T. Wallace and David C. Rubin show that ballads collected by Child and then found in the Brown collection taken from performances have changed little over the years. Also turning his attention to the oral nature of the ballad is J. Barre Toelken, who seeks to establish from the Child canon a “purified” canon of only those ballads that are oral. In looking at how ballads have been transmitted over time and geography, one may turn to William B. McCarthy’s “The Americanization of Scottish Ballads: Counterevidence from the Southwest of Scotland.” McCarthy answers critics who have found the Americanized ballad to have degenerated from its vigorous Scottish source by showing that sources in Scotland had degenerated into moralizing and lyrical weakness prior to the ballads coming to the U.S.

Representative articles concerning music are these two, one taking an anthropological view and the other taking a literary view: James Porter’s “The ‘Mary Scott’ Complex: Outline of a Diachronic Model,” seeks to reconstruct the cultural milieu from which Mary Scott’s ballads have come. Donald Winkelmann’s “Poetic/Rhythmic Stress in the Child Ballads” shows that the accentual patterns in the verse comes from a unity with the melodic rhythm. Of works representative of those concerning oral sources are Thigpen’s comprehensive index of oral informants, his “Index to the Known Oral Sources of the Child Collection,” and Porter and Gower’s musical analysis of songs from singer Jeannie Robertson’s ballad repertoire, “Jeannie Robertson: The Child Ballads.”

Articles dealing with what makes a type of ballad conform to its type include Buchan’s “Talerole Analysis and Child’s Supernatural Ballads,” Archer Taylor’s “The
English Riddle Ballad,” Coffin’s “Four Black Sheep Among the 305,” and Wilgus’s “A Tension of Essences in Murdered-Sweetheart Ballads.” Buchan finds that ballads telling of supernatural interventions may be understood by applying Propp’s role analysis as presented in *Morphology of the Folktale*. Taylor puts the riddle ballads in historical perspective, showing that when the ballads were new the singers adjusted the materials. Coffin speculates about the lack of narrative and the riddle ballads to conclude that the riddle ballads are, aptly, enigmatic. Wilgus explains that by “tension of essences” he uses the concept “set forth by Albert Lord—the recognition that certain elements tend to be so inherent in a story patterns that, even when they do not occur explicitly, they can be recognized” (241) in the ballads.

Both Irene Wood and Jean Freedman focus on the pregnancy of ballad characters to draw conclusions about the ballad community. In “The Folk Medicine of Childbirth in the English and Scottish Ballads” Wood calls to our attention folk remedies and folk beliefs as they appear surrounding the births in “Willie O’ Douglas Dale” (Child 101), “Sheath and Knife” (Child 16) “Fair Janet” (Child 64), “The Cruel Mother” (Child 20), “Fair Mary of Wallington” (Child 91) and “Willie’s Lady” (Child 6). In “With Child: Illegitimate Pregnancy in Scottish Traditional Ballads,” Jean Freedman argues against the view that “ballads represent normative community values. [Her] argument rests on a close examination of several ballad texts that are from the same culture and that focus on the same social problem: out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Rather than expressing a single response to this situation, the texts express a multiplicity of opinions and suggest a variety of outcomes” (4). Thus, Wood and Freedman focus on ballad women to suggest conclusions about ballads in general.
Some critics focus on a problem posed by a particular individual ballad, as exemplified by the following: John D. Niles in "A Traditional Ballad and Its Mask: Tam Lin" shows that the Child A version is not truly traditional but masks the underlying version. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, in "Theodor Fontane’s ‘Sir Patrick Spens,’” shows how the German art version of the Scottish ballad “Sir Patrick Spens” came into being. Sigrid Rieuwerts, in "The Historical Moorings of ‘The Gypsy Laddie’: Johnny Faa and Lady Cassillis,” shows that despite what Child had said to call into question a historical origin for the story, evidence does exist indicating historical events similar to those in the ballad.

Some critics pursue a psychoanalytical approach to study ballads. John Radford in "An Image of Death in Dreams and Ballads" suggests that images appear in both dreams and ballads and that “the investigation of such phenomena is properly the concern of psychology” (15). Karin Blair, in "Scripts for Feminine Consciousness in Child Ballads” urges women to become aware of their Jungian nature. Blair avers, "Aware of as much mythology relating to feminine consciousness as possible, we can consciously assume our freedom as women and harness femininity to our purposes” (239).

Employing a Freudian approach, Linda L. Maik analyzes “Lord Randal,” Barbara Allen, “The Wife of Usher’s Well,” and Edward” in terms of the Freudian and feminist critique, especially that of Irigaray, to assert that the ballads “corroborate either Freud’s theory of femininity itself or its reworking by later feminist theorists like Luce Irigaray” (117).

This work, then, follows a psychoanalytical approach in looking at the relationship between the subject Child and his collection. It is the neo-Freudian Lacan who tells us that the subject, the self, is never truly objective regardless of his efforts to
separate himself from his activities. Lacan’s theories then can give insights into Child’s subjectivity, a subjectivity brought into focus by the subject’s work. Child’s collecting is an act of Lacanian paternity whereby the collector, attracted especially by the bodies of the female characters, is moved to bring all the ballads under his dominion yet is subverted in his desire for dominion as female characters present themselves in terms of “bodytalk.”

To support my thesis I present three chapters, one showing that Child’s collecting may be viewed as Lacanian paternity, one chapter focusing on the presentation of women’s bodies in the ballads, and a final chapter showing that the women characters in selected ballads speak according to what critic Jane Burns terms “bodytalk.” By the time Child was collecting ballads in the mid to late 1800’s, one would not expect the ballad women characters to be wielding such strong power, yet I suggest they are working subversively upon Child.

Chapter one tells of Child the scholar and folklorist who devoted fifty years to teaching at Harvard. Child was of the school—literally—of literary folklorists, the other school being that of anthropological folklorists. Collecting the ballads was his love but was a love he had to carry out separate from his assigned duties and those duties he took upon himself as responsible teacher, colleague, and friend. Those who eulogize him point out the wide gap between the important publications to his credit, *Observations on the Language of Chaucer* and *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. They further emphasize Child’s dedication to the college, his colleagues, and his other friends. Born of a sail maker in Boston, Child, through merit, made his way into the New England cultural gentry that William Dean Howells writes of in *Literary Friends and*
Acquaintances. After having taken a degree at Harvard, Child was able to go to Germany to study with the Grimms, who influenced him throughout his life. The most accurate picture of Child may come to us through his correspondence, first with the poet James Russell Lowell in The Scholar Friend and then with an unnamed young lady in A Scholar's Letters to a Young Lady.

The most accurate picture of what has become of the Child collection, however, might surprise the collector. In chapter one, I have used the tools of critical theory, especially Lacanian theory, to show that Child has become the father of, and perhaps lover to, his rescued ballads. The Child ballads, soon after their publication became “the official” ballads, and remain so today, though folklorists have emended the canon somewhat, in observance of the more recent belief that a canon is simply not what folklore is about. Child, as collector of what was at their time of publication the canon, became the father of them whether he had intended to or not. Thus, it is telling to look at Child as literal father and friend to women. His correspondence shows him to have been loving and especially deferential, one easily charmed by beauty, both inner and outer. It is especially interesting to note Child’s interest in women authors and female literary characters in light of the way he is charmed—seduced?—by the women in the ballads. The collector’s primary impulse was to bring everything into the collection that was authentic. Child wished to bring everything of any value under his name. A linear reading of his collection from 1 through 305 shows that he was successful in his Lacanian project of exerting paternal authority.

Child would likely be surprised, though not necessarily displeased, I believe, to think of himself exercising paternal authority. He might pause still further, however, to
regard the topic of woman’s body as it appears in the body of his collection. Of the 305 ballads, 103 concern women character’s bodies. Thus, at a time when the body is a topic of considerable interest in both critical theory and anthropology, the ballads become especially interesting topics of study. Adrienne Auslander Munich tells us that the Perseus rescue myth was the prevailing Victorian fantasy. Accordingly, the Victorian Child has brought the fantasy to life through his rescuing the ballads. And even if Child would have us believe he holds mind more valuable than body, the bodies in his collection would belie the assertion. The ballads do not devalue the body to elevate the mind; the corporeal life is all one finds in the ballads, save a handful. This is especially obvious in the ballads that present the courtly love theme, such as “Old Robin of Portingale” (80) and “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard” (81).

Eighty-four of the 103 ballads concerning women’s bodies are about sex; forty-one ballads turn on the fact of a character’s being pregnant or not. It seems that ballad characters, unlike characters of metrical romances, inevitably become pregnant as a result of sexual intercourse. Motherhood in the ballads, much as it is and was in real life, is complex, part Eve and part Virgin Mary. In several of the ballads it may then come as no surprise that virginity is presented as preferable to motherhood, whatever the consequences, as in “Johnie Scot” (99). In still other ballads one sees women characters forbid men to serve as midwives, “Willie and Earl Richard’s Daughter” (102, “Leesome Brand” (15), to name two, indicating perhaps a general lack of trust, or at least lack of understanding, between the sexes. Perhaps most complex are those ballads where mothers give curses, ballads that may be interpreted to show that giving birth is, paradoxically, a death sentence. Mothers advise their children not to marry, not to grow
up, in order to avoid what cannot be avoided, death that inevitably comes to all mortals, as in “Fair Mary of Wallington” (91) and “Mother’s Malison” (216 A), for instance. Not becoming a mother may not bring about a happy end either, as ballad ladies can attest, as in “The Earl of Errol” (231). Of the many ballads dealing with sex, quite a few involve adultery, as is the case with “The Gypsie Laddie” (200), “James Douglas” (204), and “James Harris (The Daemon Lover)” (243). Infidelity, moreover, may have political implications, as in “Mary Hamilton” (173). Throughout the Child collection, ballads dealing with infidelity show the double standard, as in “Willie O Winsbury” (100). Of ballads concerning the body perhaps the most troubling are those dealing with incest, such as “Sheath and Knife” (16). Rape is the subject of ballads, too, as in “The Bonnie House of Airlie” (199). Still the rape ballads are less arresting than the domestic tragedies that center around pregnancy, as in “Fair Janet” (64). Quite rare is the domestic conflict that ends happily, as is the case with “Willie O Douglas Dale” (101). Among those ballads subject especially to analysis to literary critical theory are those that consider the gaze. Among those ballads are “The Whummil Bore” (27) and “The Fair Flower of Northumberland” (9). Finally, are those ballads that show women’s bodies being mutilated, as in “The Twix Knights” (268) and “The Queen of Scotland” (301).

Certain ballads may be interpreted according to what Jane Burns calls bodytalk, a feminist reading of a text that allows women characters to speak against the social and theoretical conventions presented in the text. The ballads are oral, changing perhaps from performance to performance. The ballads, because they are anonymous, are believed to be the productions of women as much as by men, if not more. Mary Robinson believed them to be women’s works, and Virginia Woolf had commented that
“Anon. was a woman.” As either the works of women or simply the anonymous works of unknown singers, male and female, ballad paternity is unknown. For a ballad to be authentic—authorless—it must, paradoxically, be a bastard. Thus, the highest pedigree is no pedigree at all. The work held in highest esteem is that for which no account of its origins can be made. Ballads’ “illegitimate” status makes them especially susceptible to a bodysite reading where the women characters resist conventions. Chapter three will show that women characters within the ballads are powerful, having exclusive power over childbirth, occult matters and the Eternal Feminine as Daughters of Eve. Such power as demonstrated in the ballads and reflected—or thought to be reflected—in medieval life brings a subversive message from the ballad singer to her audience. In “Leesome Brand” (15 A), to give one example, women only are shown to be qualified to preside over childbirth. In occult matters one finds the powerful female Queen of Elfland in “Thomas Rhymer.” (37), among others. The Eternal Feminine is evident in “Proud Lady Margaret” (47 C).

In all, Child’s gaze has fallen onto those 103 bodies that have subsequently enthralled him within the pages of his work and have enthralled, perhaps, the reading and singing audience. With this work set out before us, it is appropriate to consider what directions may be followed for still further study.

After many years devoted primarily to collecting and cataloguing, folklore is, as Dundes reminded us in Interpreting Folklore, beginning to analyze the works that have been collected. William McCarthy’s remarkable book, The Ballad Matrix: Personality, Milieu, and the Oral Tradition, is an example of what can be done both as it brings us theoretical insights and as it shows us how to apply those insights to field work.
McCarthy's work examines the large repertoire of Agnes Lyle of Kilbarchan, Scotland, who lived between 1780 and 1830, to show how Lyle relied on traditional narrative technique. Zumwalt, in *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent*, indicates that now the two camps within folklore, the anthropological folklorists and the literary folklorists, are talking to each other more than ever before. The time is right for collaborative, interdisciplinary work.

With the Child collection I would like to see another study take some field of critical theory and analyze the Child ballads as a complete work. Some work has been done from the Freudian standpoint (besides Lacan), and many single articles exist, but there is not, to my knowledge, another theoretical account of the Child collection as a whole. Then, too, the Child ballads lend themselves to a comparison with the written poetry being produced contemporary with them.

What this study suggests for works outside the Child collection is also intriguing. Those interested in critical theory might take on field studies where they would follow-up on the implications of this work. For instance, ballads are still being made, sung, and circulated. It would be quite interesting to see what sort of representations of woman's body show up in the contemporary ballads. Then, too, studies of more recent collections of ballads are subject to being studied as a total body of work, considering the implications of why those particular ballads were chosen. The implications for future research and study both with the Child collection and with ballads in general are rich.
CHAPTER ONE

CHILD AS FATHER: THE COLLECTOR’S AUTHORITY

This work began, in every sense, with a search for Helen Child Sargent, one of the two nominal editors of *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* from the series, The Cambridge Edition of the Poets, published in 1904, the copyright being held by the other nominal editor, George Lyman Kittredge. Similarly, this chapter begins with a search for Francis James Child. For reasons very different, the father Francis James proves almost as elusive as the daughter Helen does does. Yet this work depends upon establishing F. J. Child’s paternity—the fact of Child’s taking or the Lacanian name of the father over his collected ballads (Davis 1981). Child’s practice may be read in light of the work of Jacques Lacan, the neo-Freudian psychoanalyst. Lacanian theory employs linguistics and cultural anthropology and therefore is not as constricted as is strict Freudian theory, which employs what Ellie Ragland-Sullivan terms “a biological and spatio-temporal scenario” (Ragland-Sullivan 283). Rather than examine what happens in the subject’s physical development through time, Lacan’s theory focuses on the system of language. In Lacanian terms, Child’s mission of collecting all the true ballads is one of desire, each signifier attempting to move closer to the presumed signified, the true ballad, the artifact that was the origin of the trace that remains. Further, by placing his name on the collection, Child is, in effect, making a Lacanian statement of aggressiveness and narcissism: All the objects are mine, and, tacitly, all the objects are part of me.
Lacan’s neo-Freudian theory gives a tragic view of life. Human desire is made possible by the symbolic order, language, the Other. The symbolic order is the force that tells a man he is “I,” one whole; but because the word “I” is dependent on the symbolic order, the Other tells the subject that “I” is not unitary but split. “I” belongs not exclusively and uniquely to the subject but to something outside the ego, i.e., “I” belongs to the Other. “The “I” is also a “me” in the sense of being an object of another’s statement. The Other creates a desire for the fully integrated ego, yet it always frustrates the desire. The ego is never quite one’s own. Humans lead a life of tragic desire for that which they cannot have. To Lacan, this desire expresses itself in interplay of aggressiveness and narcissism. The aggressive personality desires domination over others; the narcissistic personality desires love from others. Although one personality tendency may dominate the other, aggressiveness and narcissism are both present in the same subject. (Lutz “Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’” 143). Thus, Child’s practice is, in Lacanian terms, a typical interplay of narcissism and aggressiveness as the apparently self-effacing scholar F. J. Child actually declares boldly his attempt to gain enduring presence through those 305 folksongs known universally as Child ballads. Though Child’s collecting the ballads operates as an innocent act of a preservationist’s attempt to save artifacts for the good of posterity, this act is not altogether innocent. He makes no claim to be author; and it is those who came after him who established the practice of referring to ballads in his collection by their “Child number.” Still, by placing the anonymous ballads under his authority, Child becomes a surrogate author, inasmuch as no other paternal name can be attached to them. By adopting orphan folk works, Child assumes both paternity and maternity. All the objects become his. In fact, the objects have become his more than he
might have presumed to have guessed. His ballads have come to be known universally as Child ballads, with the particular number he had designated given in parenthesis, as in “Lord Lovel” (Child 75), for instance. Thus, the real authors remain anonymous, having been supplanted by the usurper, Child. The ballads appear to have come down to us without fathers, paradoxically, as both immaculate conceptions and bastards. Perhaps the appeal of the ballads, both to us and to Child, derives in part from the lack of author, an appealing relief from the domineering point of view of “tellers” of tales. Collector and reader may take the ballads as if they owned them in a way they could not treat works with definite authors. Thus, ironically, when a collector such as Child picks a “real one” to put under his authority, he has been seduced by the apparently safe, non-threatening absence of a rival so that he may have his way with the ballad in question. The ballad collector is free from knowing the anxiety of influence which Harold Bloom explains in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, but at the same time he is enthralled by the feminine wiles of the deceivingly compliant, available fatherless/husbandless ballad itself.

Acknowledging the absence of an earthly human father, one may find particularly significant Child’s inclusion of those ballads where the father is otherworldly, as in “The Cherry Tree Carol” (Child 54), where the Virgin Mary’s Father of us all puts Joseph in his place, or in those ballads, such as “The Great Silkie” (113), where a supernatural lover leaves his human mate to make implausible explanation about the special origins of her child’s paternity. If one grants that the Child ballads have no author, one must speculate most curiously about why Child, an American philologist of the Victorian era, collected those the works he did—assuming that he did not record every song put forth to
him as ballad. Would not a man named Child almost be forced to go through life trying hard to be not merely son/child but father/man?

To say that Child the man may be interpreted in Lacanian terms is neither to impugn his character nor to imply that he was neurotic. Rather, seeing that Child’s project is not as innocent as he might have supposed should be seen from the anthropologist’s point of view. Claude Levi-Strauss in *Triste Tropiques* worries that his imposing himself upon a culture contaminates and forever changes that culture, despite the social scientist’s good intentions of preserving the culture by reporting its features. Though I have found no evidence that Child had similar misgivings, one may grant that were he to see what has transpired in folklore studies since his time, Child might caution colleagues against privileging the ballads contained in his collection, gathered in from manuscripts, above those that have been collected through field research. It is the ballad itself, the work, the “work of nature” that matters and not its conveyors. Child viewed himself as a sort of godfather to the ballads, one entrusted to oversee their wellbeing.

Accounts of Child’s life show him to have been a loving friend and father. His benign paternalistic gathering in of ballads may been seen as an extension of his propensity of gathering into himself other things beautiful and worthy.

Child the actual man was known for personal modesty. “The author counts for nothing,” says Child of ballad authorship in an oft-quoted article by Child as it appeared in the *Universal Cyclopaedia* (Hart 755). Similarly, one might paraphrase Child himself to arrive at his apparent operating slogan: “The collector counts for nothing.” Accounts of Child’s life find him to have been self-effacing.
Tributes to Child written shortly after his death tell of the selfless scholar. In the *Atlantic Monthly* for December 1896, George L. Kittredge writes of his friend and mentor:

Francis James Child, whose sudden death on the 11th of last September came as a bitter personal loss not only to an unusually large circle of attached friends... but to very many scholars who knew him through his works alone, was one of the few learned men to whom the old title of “master” was justly due and freely accorded. With astonishing erudition, which nothing seemed to have escaped, he united infectious enthusiasm and a power of lucid and fruitful exposition that made him one of the greatest of teachers, and a warmth and openness of heart that won the affection of all who knew him. In most men, however complex their characters, one can distinguish the qualities of the heart, in some degree from the qualities of the head. In Professor Child no such distinction was possible, for all the elements of his many-sided nature were fused in his marked and powerful individuality. In his case, the scholar and the man cannot be separated. His life and his learning were one; his work was the expression of himself. (“Professor Child” 737)

It is perhaps too convenient to have from Kittredge such license to equate the man Child and his work. Kittredge goes on to say of Child:

To younger scholars Professor Child was an influence at once stimulating and benignant. To confer with him was always to be stirred to greater effort, but, at the same time, the serenity of his devotion and learning chastened the petulance of immature ambition in others... In the presence of his noble modesty the bustle of self-assertion was quieted and the petty spirit of pedantic wrangling could not
assert itself. However severe his criticism, there were no personalities in it. He could not be other than outspoken,—concealment and shuffling were abhorrent to him,—yet such was his kindliness that his frankest judgments never wounded; even his reproofs had left no sting . . . “He is almost the only man I know,” said one in his lifetime, “who thinks no evil.” (“Professor Child” 739-40)

In his tribute to Child, C. E. Norton, in the Harvard Graduate’s Magazine, writes of his colleague’s twenty years as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, indicating Child’s unselfish nature, his willingness to be of service to Harvard:

A great part of his [Child’s] time was employed in the teaching of English composition, and in the drudgery of correcting students’ exercises, but he had an indefatigable industry and a steady ardent of learning, and he found time to carry on his own special studies . . . For many years after this [the publication of “Observations on the Language of Chaucer”] Mr. Child published little, but with steady purpose devoted such leisure as his incessant professional task allowed to the increase of his already vast stores of learning and to the accumulation of the material for the main work of his life, a complete critical edition of “The English and Scottish Ballads” (Norton 163-4)

Speaking of Child’s personal characteristics, Norton writes: “He was one of the most simple, frank, and natural of men; there was no touch of selfishness in his disposition, and he was as modest in his appreciation of himself as he was generous in his appreciation of others. His nature was sweet and pure to the core . . . [possessing] a certain quality of tender and genial humanity” (Norton 166). William James concurs, as he writes to his brother Henry these words, which Henry James records in Notes of a Son
and Brother: “He [Child] had a moral delicacy and richness of heart that I never saw and never expect to see equaled” (qtd. in Dictionary of American Biography 2: 67).

Such laudatory accounts of F. J. Child’s humility one would expect from colleagues and friends writing in memoriam. Still, later biographers, writing at some time distance from the subject, corroborate this vision. Gamaliel Bradford in As God Made Them remarks:

Any desire for general literary fame was restrained by the charming innate modesty which was so conspicuous in him [Child] always and which shows in the earnest request to [James Russell] Lowell: “I wish you would alter the note [of compliment] and strike out on page 160 ‘who has done more,’ etc. I am content to have ‘fittingly’ remain, if you think it should but that is quite flattery enough for me.” (211-20).

The fact that Child was perhaps deferential to his famous friend James Russell Lowell may be attributed to both friendship and fame, but reports about Child from fellow folklorist Gummere also shows him to have been a man of humble generosity. Gummere recalled that the last time he spoke with Child, Child had remarked “of a great but unjustly treated scholar who had been with them, ‘Ah, but we must do something for that man.’” Said Gummere late, “These were the last words I heard him say, and they were characteristic of all I had ever heard from him, of all I had ever heard said about him’” (Bradford 213).

Yet it is from Norton’s account of Child’s fifty years of service to Harvard, where Child selflessly performed what Norton calls a professor’s “irksome duties,” that one can glimpse ambition in the man Child. Norton quotes Child:
“It is my wish not be begin to print The English and Scottish Popular Ballads until this unrestricted title should be justified by my having at command every valuable copy of every known ballad . . . . What is still lacking is believed to bear no great proportion to what is in had . . . . Meanwhile the uncertainties of the world forbid a longer delay to publish so much as has been got together.” (165)

Child’s ambition was to collect the English and Scottish ballads, not merely some, most, nor selections from. The collector of no account would become the collector of all accounts. William McCarthy reminds us that for Child balladry was a “closed account.” Child believed that ballads were no longer being made and that he therefore could in fact gather them all into a definitive edition, a permanent collection of all the English and Scottish ballads that had ever been or ever would be. McCarthy goes on to allow that Child has indeed provided us with all the ballads of value collected before 1880. Contrary to Child’s expectation, however, “one of the first results of the publication of this definitive statement of a closed account was a reopening of the account. Ballad collecting flourished” (2).

Acknowledging that Child was mistaken in his view that balladry was a dead art, let us look at what Child intended to do and how he went about doing it. Let us also attempt to put on hold for a time our contemporary views of balladry and our knowledge of ballad scholarship to imagine the field as it was for Child.

Child may not have been to balladry what Keats’ stout Cortez was to global exploration, but he was not far from being alone on a peak in Darien. The conquistador metaphor is apt: in the name of a higher good, Child claimed for his own kind the intellectual property that had once been owned communally by the folk. In his defense,
though, Child’s pursuit of Manifest Destiny was more innocent than was the conquest of the communally held land of indigenous peoples. Child saw himself akin to the archeologist, recovering the relics of an extinct people. Unlike present-day folklorists, Child did not acknowledge that folkways and folk transmission continued and still continue long after a people have become literate. Hustvedt explains: “More than once in his letters to various correspondents he [Child] expressed the conviction that it was his principal duty to rescue all of the texts that were still to be recaptured” (222-3).

For Child and his contemporaries, the advent of printing had meant the inevitable end of popular culture as they defined it. Anthropologist Rosemary Zumwalt, in *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent* explains Child’s view that ballads were no longer being composed:

Child viewed the English and Scottish ballads “as sealed or dried up forever” (Hustvedt 1930, 248). Education—or what Child referred to in his writings as Book Culture—had spelled doom for this form of oral literature (Michael 1960, 33). Child, with a survivalist orientation, expected folklore to endure in the fringes of society, in nooks and crannies where time had passed people by. As he remarked to his students, “the less book education [there is], the more hope, with persons of native intelligence, of a memory well stored with traditional treasures” (Michael 1960, 33). Thus Child anticipated that some ballads “must linger” on the Shetland Islands (Howe and Cottrell 1952, 440).

In 1873, Child spent eight weeks in England and Scotland collecting ballads in manuscript form and from oral sources. He returned to this area in 1877 . . . . He wrote to Danish ballad collector Gruntvig: “I have now got all the
manuscripts that are to be had, and I am trying to collect ballads that are left in
Aberdeenshire, but I have no reason to wait longer” (Hustvedt 1930, 271). (46).

When regarding the relationship between the printed word and the spoken word as
it was conceived of by our precursor literary folklorists of the late nineteenth and early
twentieth century, our academic community, having been schooled in Saussure and
Derrida—or Marshall McLuhan, for that matter—may think themselves too sophisticated
for Kittredge’s linguistic theory about the disappearance of the folk (a theory not unlike
Ong’s treated here later), but his words were the orthodoxy of his time, showing the
concept that the folk who produced ballads were no more:

The alphabet was no doubt a great invention . . . [B]ut now and then it would be
convenient if one’s thoughts could dissociate for a moment from the written or
printed page. In theory this is easy enough to do. Practically, however, it is
difficult for even a professed student of linguistics to remember that a word is
properly a sign made with the vocal organs, and that the written word is merely a
conventional symbol for the word that is spoken . . . Author to us means a man
with a pen in his hand,--a writer, as we call him. It requires a combined effort of
the reason and the imagination to conceive a poet as a person who cannot write,
singing or reciting his verses to an audience that cannot read. History, as we
understand it, is the written record or even the printed volume; it is no longer the
accumulated fund of tribal memories, handed down from father to son by oral
tradition. Yet everybody knows that quite apart from what we usually call
literature, there is a great mass of song and story and miscellaneous lore which
circulates among those who have neither books nor newspapers. To this oral
literature as the French call it, education is no friend. Culture destroys it, sometimes with amazing rapidity. When a nation learns to read, it begins to disregard its traditional tales; it feels a little ashamed of them; and finally it closes both the will and the power to remember and transmit them. What was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gather up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether.

To this oral literature belong the popular ballads, and we are justified, therefore, in calling them “folk-poetry.” They are not, like written literature, the exclusive possession of the cultivated classes in any community. They belonged, in the first instance, to the whole people, at a time when there were no formal divisions of literate and illiterate; when the intellectual interests of all were substantially identical, from the king to the peasant. As civilization advanced, they were banished from polite society, but they lived on among the humble, among shepherds and ploughboys and “the spinsters and the knitters in the sun,” until even these became too sophisticated to care for them and they were heard no more. *(English and Scottish Popular Ballads xii)*

Child’s becoming the rescuer of those no-longer-heard ballads was natural for him but not premeditated. He was no folkloric Milton preparing himself to justify the ways of the bygone illiterate folk to cultured man. Instead, Child came at the project much as most academics come to their life’s work: he got a book contract. After having edited in 1855 five volumes of *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, Child was engaged to serve as general editor for a series on British poets, a series that eventually extended to over 150 volumes *(Jones 24)*. For this series it made sense that Child himself
produce the eight-volume edition of English and Scottish ballads (1857-58), inasmuch as he was already a folklorist, having studied in Germany with the Grimms. Working against deadlines borne out of the publisher’s demands, Child gathered his texts from already-published works. Then he went on to produce his Observations on the Language of Chaucer, a “linguistic analysis of the number of syllables in the words employed by Chaucer . . . [showing] when the final e was or was not pronounced” (Jones 25).

While Child went on with his professional life editing, teaching, and performing the “drudgery,” as fellow Harvard professor C. E. Norton termed it, of marking undergraduate compositions, what to him had been a work too hurried by publishing demands, his work on the English and Scottish ballads, prompted Child to want to do the project the way he believed it deserved to be done.

As though heeding his own frequent admonition to his students, “Do it so it shall never have to be done again” (Bradford 205), Child set out to find for his revised collection “every valuable copy of every known ballad” (Child The English and Scottish Ballads vii). In his effort to do it so that it shall never have to be done again, Child set out to right the wrongs of his predecessor collector/editors. Though not polemical on the subject of other collectors’ having “improved what they found and failed to account properly for their own creative participation” (Hustvedt 206), Child vowed to put in print only the authentic versions as they appeared in the manuscripts which had recorded oral performances.

Child delineates his search for the real thing, if not the Signified then the Signifier closest to it, in the preface to his final collection:
"The Editor, after selecting the most authentic copies, has carefully adhered to the
originals as they stand in the printed collections, sometimes restoring a reading
which has been changed without reason, and in all cases indicating deviations,
whether his own or those of others, in the margin." (qtd. in Hustvedt 210)

Child's search for the real thing and that same search as it has been conducted
subsequently—and consequently—by folklorists universally is a matter of theoretical
importance to be dealt with within this work later. First, let us see what prepared Child
for his work and how he went about it.

After having graduated first in his class at Harvard in 1846, Child remained at the
college as Tutor in Mathematics. Then in 1849 he was granted leave to study in Europe,
concentrating on Germanic philology in Berlin and Gottingen, where he studied under
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (Jones 24). Of this experience David Bynum writes:

Germanic philology and classical antiquity were the subjects which Child
followed for two years . . . . The comparison of ancient and modern European
culture implicit in this combination of interests was no accident; such historicism
was a cardinal principle with the Grimm brothers and informed all their learned
work in the various fields of medieval literature, historical linguistics, legal
history, comparative mythology, and folklore. The stimulation which Child
derived in these two years from the Grimms and their circle remained by his own
admission the dominant force in his intellectual activity from that time on.
Kittredge tells us that for the rest of his life Child kept a portrait of Jacob and
Wilhelm Grimm on his mantel over the fireplace in his study . . . . But it was not
just the example of their historicism or their comparative studies of literature that
Child esteemed so much, for he had known about that before he went to Germany. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm exercised a lifelong influence on his because they were the first great modern collectors of oral tradition in Europe. (255-6).

From our perspective as students of literature and of folklore, Child’s privileging, to use the deconstructionist term, of oral literature over printed literature is hardly revolutionary. But Child was, as Bynum reports, “the first pioneer of his subject, and . . . he wrought the foundations upon which all the principal departments of activity essential to oral literary studies still rest” (242).

In terms of folklore studies today, Child’s methodology appears to be so unremarkable that it is arresting to consider what the academic world was like before The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, as Charles E. Norton demonstrates in his tribute to Child, published in the Harvard Graduates’ Magazine following Child’s death in 1896:

The character of the undertaking [ESPB] was set forth in the prospectus: The popular ballads existing in the English language had never been collected into one body; a large portion of the remains of the ballads was unprinted; the text of much that was in print was vitiated by editorial changes: it was now proposed to publish all in their entirety and their purity; to include every independent version of every ballad, and to record all important variations of different copies, both printed and manuscript, each ballad was to have a proper preface, and, in the case of those ballads which the English have in common with other nations, an account was to be given of related traditions. The work was to be completed by a general introduction, a glossary, and indexes. (164-5)
As we know, Child accomplished all, save for parts of the indexes and most of the introduction, which he was preparing at the time of his death. Writing some fifty years later, Hustvedt characterizes the project this way:

As the resolution ripened in Child’s mind . . . four principal fields of exploration presented themselves: He must get behind all of the printed texts to their sources. He must circumscribe the ground so as to exclude ballads not popular and to include ballads and versions of ballads which had not yet come to his knowledge. He must arrive at a satisfactory theoretical view of the material and so determine the general arrangement of the collection and the larger questions of interpretations of texts. He must study the whole available mass of popular literature, especially as recorded in all of the European tongues, in order to set forth the numerous foreign parallels and relationships in a broad and comparative survey . . . During the years that he was actively engaged in shaping the new work for publication, no one of the needful considerations can have been far from his thoughts. (213)

In Child’s search for authentic popular ballads, as they differed from merely apparent ballads that had fooled eyes and ears less astute than his own, we glimpse a motive not altogether innocent, at least not innocent in terms of Lacanian paternity. Child, unlike his precursor collectors, would recognize the genuinely popular “spontaneous products of nature,” as he termed them in the revised preface to the second edition of English and Scottish Ballads (1860) as they differ from the works of the professional balladmaker. Child, like Adam, would view every living creature and name
each one. Child would serve as the Father of Us All, no mere composer of imitative verse, but he who would have dominion over Nature's creatures.

Child's practical, working theory of the character and origins of the ballad is less romantic than his metaphorical conception of the ballads as "spontaneous works of nature." Acknowledging that, it is helpful to a theoretical critique of Child's work to observe the metaphors he chooses to explain his relationship to his project.

In light of biographical works I have been using, I find myself feeling no small portion of Oedipal guilt, as I presume to declare that Child's ballad collection is a defiant Promethean work whereby Child sets himself up as one having dominion, claiming authority over the authorless works.

All of the biographical sources cited here, save Zumwalt—Norton, Kittredge, Hustvedt, and Bynum—are, at least in part, encomia to Child's life and work, all written by men who are Child's heirs, grateful sons and younger brothers, in the lineage of Child at Harvard. David E. Bynum, writing for the Harvard Library Bulletin in "Child's Legacy Enlarged: Oral Literary Studies at Harvard Since 1856," declares:

Harvard University is today internationally known and respected as a center for the collection and study of oral literature. The University's prominence in this field arises partly from the devoted work of its numerous present members who are engaged in oral literary studies, and partly from an older tradition of scholarship on oral literature that goes back more than a hundred years in the history of Harvard College. Much of the best work now being done, whether at Harvard or elsewhere, is only a fulfillment and deepening of the research on oral literature that began at Harvard about the year 1856. The entire faculty of
Harvard College in 1856 numbered only fourteen men. . . . Professor Child had given up teaching numbers to become in 1851 Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, and it was while he occupied this chair that he began the study of oral literature at Harvard. A faculty of fourteen men in a college with an enrollment of 382 undergraduates was not so large that any member of the faculty could give himself exclusively to his own intellectual pursuits. Still, it was large enough for this one man, Francis Child, to begin a forty-year career dedicated to study and publication of the so-called “popular” ballads of Britain. (238-40)

Characterizing Child as rugged pioneer, having cut out of the New World wilderness a garden plot in which the transplanted, rescued Scottish and English works of nature could flourish safely under his care, Bynum employs the myth of American Adam—and American Noah—in his account of patriarch Child’s place in history, an endorsement of Child’s position as Lacanian father.

Child himself did not go immediately to Britain to collect his specimens, ballads as they appeared in unpublished manuscripts. Rather, he relied on “numerous persons in Great Britain over a period of considerably more than a quarter of a century. The main progress of the quest . . . can be followed through his printed acknowledgements of assistance and through extant letters addressed to him by many people who aided him in tracking down elusive sources and in recovering manuscripts long hidden or believed to have been permanently lost” (Hustvedt 214). William Macmath of Edinburgh was one of Child’s most valuable helpers in the collecting effort, as Hustvedt details:

Macmath’s services were of many sorts. In the course of the years he contributed a number of individual texts and many shrewd bits of practical counsel. He was
particularly insistent that Child should not be hurried into print before he had
done what was humanly possible to arrive at the original sources of all the
ballads. He acted as Child's agent in negotiations leading to the purchase and the
use of several of the most necessary documents. With his own hand he copied
thousands of lines of text. Of the capital manuscript sources which he helped
unearth, to copy, or to secure for Child by purchase, particular mention should be
made of the Glenriddell MSS, the Kinloch MSS, and the Abbotsford MSS.

Macmath's fidelity brought in the Abbotsford MSS for use almost at the eleventh
hour . . . (215)

In elaborating upon Child's collecting process, Hustvedt continues by explaining how
Child collected MSS, how he went about finding all the objects, as the Lacanian scheme
would have it:

Through the manuscripts Child not only was enabled to govern the texts that had
been printed; he secured at the same time many texts and versions that had not
been printed at all. Meanwhile he was engaged by other means in adding to his
growing tally, notably by an attempt, never wholly given over, at rescuing what
might still survive in oral tradition . . . . He inserted in Notes and Queries an
appeal for aid in securing manuscripts of older date and more especially for
individual collaboration in recovering anything in the way of traditional ballads or
fragments that yet remained in the memories of the people. Whatever should be
thus rescued was to be sent to Furnivall, who had offered to act for Child.
Twenty-five hundred copies of this appeal were printed as leaflets to be circulated
in Scotland . . . . Though Child later deplored the almost total want of fruits from
this appeal, because of the drying up of the springs of oral tradition, yet he gained the indirect advantage of making his undertaking more widely known and in the course of the years no doubt direct contributions sufficient to reward his hopes in part. During the 'seventies he continued from time to time to insert notices in *Notes and Queries* . . . . In October, 1880, he published in the same periodical a second more general request for assistance in recovering ballads that might still be discovered floating down the thinning current of oral transmission. He explains that a pretty thorough search has demonstrated that little of the sort is to be expected from Scotland, but that remnants of Anglo-Irish balladry might with reasonable expectation be looked for in Ireland, where as yet no systematic attempt has been made to form a collection of that kind . . . . Child issued in January, 1881, a circular of four pages addressed especially to students in colleges, noting his disappointing experiences with reference to Scotland, expressing anew his belief that Ireland is a more hopeful field, and asking particularly that those who should see his circular endeavor to find immigrant Anglo-Irish ballads in the various regions of the United States . . . . The circular gives instructions for the proper recording of what may be found and presents two ballad texts in full to show the sort of thing that is wanted. (216-17)

Hustvedt, another Harvard progeny of the Lacanian father Child, ends his account of Child’s collecting process by saying, “Other manuscript sources, it is true, turned up afterward; but the public appeals for oral survivals here sketched show how thoroughly Child employed all the possible means of making his work literally
comprehensive. Throughout his life he continued unremitting in the pursuit of that aim” (218).

From the evidence presented here, it becomes apparent that Child holds the position as patriarch, thereby allowing for my interpreting him to be the Lacanian father to his collection. Rosemary Zumwalt, an anthropological folklorist, reiterates the well-known facts about Child’s place in history:

Child’s corpus on the ballad has left a classic in folklore scholarship. The work is so crucial for ballad studies that folklorists cite the number of the “Child Ballad” as their point of reference. Throughout the course of his research, Child was consciously selecting ballad texts that would represent the purest form, the classic ballads. (47-8).

What, then, constituted for Child “ballad texts that would represent the purest form”? How did the dutiful good shepherd know his own sheep? Characteristic of his good shepherd’s role, Child continued the ballad search until his death, having put off writing what was presumed to have been his definitive word on the meaning of the ballads, until he had brought them all safely in.

Having spent twenty-two years compiling ballad texts for The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, and even as he continued collecting in preparation for a second edition, Child finally began to compose what ballad-scholars presume would have been his definitive essay on the ballads. Death took him before he could finish more than a paragraph of the draft. “Child’s essay on ballads remains one of the great unwritten works of American scholarship,” states James Reppert (197). In 1906, Walter Morris Hart constructed, from Child’s writings, especially from his notes in English and Scottish
Popular Ballads, and from his practice in compiling, what Child must have believed about the ballads but never delivered in a single, coherent writing. Hart concludes as follows:

We are now in position to attempt a summary of Professor Child's conception of the popular ballad. He regarded it as a distinct species of poetry, which precedes the poetry of art, as the product of a homogeneous people, the expression of our common nature, of the mind and heart of the people, never of the personality of an individual man, devoid, therefore, of all subjectivity and self-consciousness. Hence the author counts for nothing; hence, too, the ballad is difficult to imitate and most attempts in this way are ridiculous failures. In transmission the ballad regularly departs from the original form, least in the mouths of unlearned people more in the hands of professional singers and editors. (805)

Throughout his writings, Child laments that he is almost too late to find ballads with the elements of their original beauty, being closest to their original form, not having lost the "wild grace" that Child mentions in his correspondence to James Russell Lowell (Child, The Scholar Friend 41-2). Child regrets having been born too late to have gathered up the treasure as it once had been. Child writes to Lowell, who was then serving as U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James, to thank him for securing the Campbell MS: "The ballads are not what they would have been two hundred years ago, but could not possibly be dispensed with now that I have undertaken to make a breade [?] of every rag the wild Muse ever wore" (The Scholar Friend 56. Similarly, continuing to express his regret at the loss of ballads as they once had been, Child writes to Lowell in 1884:
I shall send you Part II of Ballads this week, I suppose. I have no manuscript ballads to get hold of now but a parcel of Kirkpatrick Sharpe’s. We got everything Bishop Percy had accumulated for a 4th volume of the Reliques. A drefful [sic] poor volume it would have been. Among all the papers there are not eight or ten traditional ballads. Having been gathered about 1775, or earlier, they ought to be a good deal better. But ballads should have been collected as early as 1600; then there would have been a very nice crop; the aftermath is very weedy.

(The Scholar Friend 68)

Thus, at the time when one would have expected Child to express satisfaction over the publication of Part II of what was his master work. Child looks at his work and mourns the loss of what is not there, as if to echo the ancient Anglo-Saxon scop’s ubi sunt: “Where are they now who once walked the earth?”

Child’s view that folklore was in the process of devolving, was, according to Rosemary Zumwalt, both evolutionary and devolutionary, as was typical of the literary folklorists of Child’s time. In the nineteenth-century evolutionary framework, humanity evolved in three stages: savagery to barbarism to civilization. As the evolution took place, folklore, as a result, devolved, nearing extinction as civilization became widespread (103). Though Zumwalt’s assessment of Child’s premises is essentially correct, her argument should be considered in the light of her own orientation. She is in agreement with Alan Dundes, who writes to correct the misconceptions about what folklore really is. An anthropological folklorist, Dundes has been a leader in re-defining the folk. Weary with the popular—and scholarly—misconception of the folk as peasants, especially European peasants, Dundes declares:
The term “folk” can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity. (6-7).

Dundes’ definition has become, since the time he posited it in 1965, orthodoxy for most folklorists, and, in fact, is the definition adhered to as a given in this work. Still, one must understand that those who have written to dispel the misbegotten notions of nineteenth century literary folklorists do lump together and almost dismiss their work as no longer relevant. To this work at hand, by contrast, Child’s work is the point, and therefore, an analysis of his view of the nature of the ballads and their origins, the folk from whence they came, must be subtly nuanced.

Let us grant that Zumwalt is correct when she writes as follows:

Child did not concur with Wilhelm Grimm who said that the ballads “themselves.” An individual, after all, composed them, “Still the auth nothing” and the ballad comes to us an anonymous creation. This [Child] stated succinctly, “The fundamental characteristic of popu therefore the absence of subjectivity and of self-consciousness.”

Let us view in the light of Reppert’s work, however, Zumwalt’s assert: believed that “the popular ballad had its origin in that class whose ac’
depict—the upper class” (103). Reppert cites Louise Pound’s assertion that “the social atmosphere of the ballads is the atmosphere of the upper classes. Certainly no peasant audience or authorship is mirrored in them,” and concludes that “Louise Pound states plainly everything that Child implied” (206). It seems that there is some logical slippage here. The ballads themselves as works of art may demonstrate or reflect the atmosphere of the upper classes, but that is no certain indication that Child believed the ballads to have originated with that class. Origins are of special interest to anthropological folklorists, who employ folklore as a means to the end of studying the nature of the culture in which it is found. Child, by contrast, indicates a primary interest in the works as oral art themselves, their study being an end unto itself. Reppert continues:

If it is reasonable to perceive an analogy between Child and Pound in the matter of the aristocratic aspects [aspects, not origins] of ballads, it is difficult to interpret Child’s remarks about the popular ballad in process of transmission. Not only do Child’s comments establish a dichotomy between ballad content and ballad transmission, but his criticisms are in themselves contradictory. In “The Two Brothers” (No. 49) we are told that “It is interesting to find the ballad in the mouths of children in American cities, . . . in the mouths of the poorest, whose heritage these old things are” (II, 435). Yet we have only just been told in “Hind Etin” (No. 41) that “It is scarcely necessary to remark that this ballad, like too many others, has suffered severely by the accidents of tradition. [Version] A has been not simply damaged by passing through low mouths, but has been worked over by low hands. Something considerable has been lost from the story, and fine
romantic features, preserved in Norse and German ballads, have been quite effaced" (I, 360).

For Child, "low mouths" and "low hands" were not necessarily attached to persons of the lower social classes. For Child, "low mouths" and "low hands" would belong to anyone, noble or common, who corrupted a ballad in the process of transmitting it. Child himself had had low beginnings as the son of a Boston sailmaker. One of eight children, Child was enrolled in the English High school when the headmaster recommended that he be transferred to the Boston Latin High School to prepare to enter Harvard (Jones 24).

Child's studies at Harvard were made possible through financing from the headmaster at the Latin High School, whom Child repaid with interest and "grateful Affection," says C. E. Norton (161-62). About Child's origins, Norton recounts this to the Harvard community: "His father was a sailmaker, one of that class of intelligent and independent mechanics which has had a large share in determining the character of our democratic community, as of old the same class had in Athens and in Florence" (161). Though Child had ascended to become a member of the New England cultural gentry that William Dean Howells writes of in Literary Friends and Acquaintances (qtd. in Brodhead 470-71), nothing about what he has written himself nor what others have written about the man Child would indicate that he would presume that ballads in the mouths and hands of commoners, not nobility, would necessarily debase those ballads. To the contrary, Child's project of collecting the ballads was likely meant to put them into the hands and mouths of the common populace, as was typical practice among the high culture gentry to which he, through merit, not birth, had gained membership. Such was the duty of that
class, explains Richard H. Brodhead in the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*:

This group was secularized in outlook, . . . cosmopolitan in range, looking to the European culture world—more than to socially remote areas of American life—as an extension of its sphere. It cared about the traditional high arts and letters—indeed, it located in the domain of the arts the sort of founding or elemental value no longer located in religion. And, believing that concern for such values was the base of civilization itself, it felt entitled and even obliged to try to impose this sense of value throughout society: to disseminate culture so conceived throughout the land, and so to win minds to that reverence for elevated art . . . .

In the gentry thus described, mid-nineteenth-century America had a group doubly defined by its authentic care for literature as a supreme value and by the sense of its right and duty to impose this care on groups with other values. (Typical of such imperialism, when Beadle's Dime Novels caught on as a mass entertainment, Charles Eliot Norton, cosmopelte Harvard art historian and early champion of the aesthetic, tried to persuade Beadle to print high culture dime novels: a transparent move to expropriate a "vulgar" means of cultural production and bring the vulgar many into high culture. (471)

Consistent with this sense that art exerts efficacious powers on its audience, Child's words show that his focus was on the ballad as a work of high culture, having efficacy for audiences past, present, and, through his efforts as collector, future. Saying that he wished he had the money to go to the Shetland Islands to collect ballads, Child writes to James R. Lowell: "Only if I were on the spot . . . . There *must* be ballads there-
how else have the people held out against poverty, cold and darkness?” (The Scholar Friend 45). Thus, Child implies that a people who have habitually endured hardships and have prevailed must have a store of authentic ballads as their source of spiritual strength. If the ballads are, for Child, fragments which humankind has traditionally shored up against its ruin, it is little wonder that he exhibits disgust and anger when he finds that a ballad text has been tampered with by “forgers and manipulators,” as Kittredge calls them. (“Professor Child” 739). Kittredge, a man not known for having a romanticized view of life (Zumwalt 51), indicates his own belief that contact with the ballads strengthened and nourished his mentor, Child: “Constant association with the spirit of the folk did its part in maintaining study and research, that freshness and buoyancy of mind which was the wonder of all who met Professor Child for the first time and the perpetual delight of his friends and associates” (“Professor Child” 739).

For Child, the origin of the ballad, the culture in which it had its beginning, was a less compelling issue than was the aesthetic quality of a particular text. His collection, however, was motivated less by an epicurean desire for personal pleasure than it was by a cultural missionary’s interest in disseminating potent texts to posterity. Accordingly, in his note accompanying “Twa Sisters” (10), Child writes about plot, “The restoration of the younger sister, like all good endings foisted on tragedies, emasculates the story.” Child’s ballads, those “works of nature,” were not, to Child, inert artifacts; his ballads were vital, capable of doing something, of having an effect upon those who would engage them. Kittredge observes of Child,

No detail of language or tradition or archaeology was to him a mere lifeless fact; it was transmuted into something vital, and became a part of that
universal humanity which always moved him wherever he found it, whether in the pages of a mediaeval chronicle, or in the stammering accents of a late and vulgarly distorted ballad, or in the faces of the street boys who begged roses from his garden. No man ever felt a keener interest in his kind, and no scholar ever brought this interest into more vivifying contact with the technicalities of his special studies. ("Professor Child" 738)

It is consistent with Kittredge’s characterization of Child and with Child’s life as a teacher that would amplify his role as surrogate parent, first as father to his students during his fifty years of teaching at Harvard, and then as adoptive, nay, presumptive, father, mother, and midwife to the ballad texts themselves, thereby subject to interpretation by means of Lacanian theory to be father to his collection.

With what justification did Child presume to inscribe his own name on the ballads whose true paternity—or—maternity—was lost to antiquity? Let us set aside for later an examination of notions of ownership of intellectual property. To Child, the ballad was an antique artifact, telling a story older still (Reppert 200). Reppert elaborates:

It [the Child ballad] preserves ancient traits or features—facts and fictions from verifiable folklore. Given two modern ballads of approximately the same quality and date, one with analogues in tradition, one without, Child would give precedence to the former. In the case of a single ballad with a long transmission history, the earlier text would be the A version. Of two ballads of approximately equal antiquity and quality, the preference is for the one closest to the original form of its story. If both were close to their originals, then the story which preserves the more antique feature is accorded the more important position. As a
further reduction, where there are equal amounts of folklore, the preference seems to be for the Nordic or Scandinavian tradition. (200)

From this we can see that Child was primarily interested in finding the least corrupted form of the ballad, with the ballad’s being an object of study. And I use the term object deliberately. In practice, Child was a formalist, regarding the ballad as having ontological status, existing separately from its author(s) and its audience. Child posited certain characteristics as requisite of the ballad genre and then examined each ballad text in terms of the criteria for the genre. Ballad makers were subsumed in interest of their products, their artifacts. Such a practice seems so normal as to go unremarked among those of us schooled in literature, not anthropology. The anthropological folklorists study folklore as a means to understanding the culture that produced it (Zumwalt 9). Child’s interest in folklore privileges the work above its makers (and receivers); the anthropological folklorists privilege the makers (and receivers) above the work. Though anthropologists like Zumwalt and Dundes are aware of what literary folklorists are about, their own disciplinary bent influences how they assess literary folklore studies.

Though Child acknowledged the fact of ballad makers and the fact of ballads as oral in origin, these were not his main concerns. His concern was collecting all the true ballads. Reppert explains that Part V of Child’s collection is especially telling in that it shows Child’s attempt to capture all the extant ballads:

The four volumes before it contain the best ballads . . . Child was sure he had not exhausted all the possibilities of versions of ballads from Ireland, Shetland, Aberdeenshire, and from old magazines, to name instances he cited himself. Perhaps not enough account has been taken of the dynamic aspect of
ESPB; the collection was constantly being expanded. Child was constantly changing his mind; new material and fresh problems were constantly arising.

(212)

Child wished to place under his authority all the authentic ballads, even those that did not possess the fine qualities of those he had chosen for the first volumes of the collection. In his correspondence to Miss “M”, as it is collected in A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady: Passages from the Later Correspondence of Francis James Child, Child indicates his interest in having a comprehensive collection even if it means some selections are of inferior quality. He writes in 1890, “I am rid of a seventh ballad book and well into an eighth. I do not care now except to finish them for the romantic things are all done. Still, I have some unprinted versions of Walter Scott’s to go in, which give a little fragrance to the domestic tragedies and comedies. A good parcel came last week, many of them addressed to ‘Walter Scott, Esq., Advocate,’ from 1802 on—before he was in the least famous” (To a Young Lady 103-4). Then again in 1893, Child writes to “M”, “I am getting slowly through with the last parcel of ballads (not the last number of the book, there will be one more of indexes, etc.) and shall be very glad to have it off my hands, for now it is only a necessity to me and no interest. There are other things which I should like to do” (138).

After looking over the ballads Child chose to include in the collection, I tentatively concluded that the sex may not be overtly erotic, but the violence may be rather graphic. In discussing what might have caused Child to omit an ancient narrative folksong from his collection, members of the University of Indiana-sponsored ballad listserv corresponded by e-mail. Though he supplies no evidence, M.E. Brown asserts
that despite Child’s being very much against emendations, Child suppressed often materials that he found distasteful. Brown concludes, “The eighteenth and nineteenth century Scottish approach was to separate out such material and print it in very small numbers for friends. This was, of course, very much an old boys club!” (17 May 1995).

In the same e-mail discussion, Bob Waltz, editor of the on-line Ballad Index, writes,

As far as censorship is concerned, there is very little in Child. If he prints a text, he prints it as he received it. On the other hand, many of his sources regularly bowdlerized what they collected. Child also left out a number of ballads for less obvious reasons (e.g. “The Blind Beggar of Bethnell Green”). He may have omitted some songs as beneath notice (Ed Cray likes to point out his omission of “The Darby Ram,” which is obviously a very popular piece but perhaps a little too humble for Child’s definition of a ballad). It seems to me that I heard of another instance of Child omitting something because it was too broadly sexual, but I can’t recall what it was. Still, the general conclusion stands: Child did not mutilate. Nor did he dodge hot topics; he printed ballads on all sorts of delicate subjects. Murder and fornication ballads are too common to mention, but there is also infanticide (“The Cruel Mother”, “Mary Hamilton”), incest (“Lizzie Wan”, “Edward”, “Sheath and Knife”), homosexuality (“The Earl of Errol”—sort of), even, in a way, “ethnic cleansing” (think about “Bonnie Susie Cleland”). The only sort of censorship Child applied is that he omitted certain pieces as beneath mention. (17 May 1995).

From Child’s own words, we learn that he was much more concerned about bringing all the ballads under his name than he was about applying aesthetic
niceties to his canon. Were he to err, he wished to err on the side of including a false ballad rather than excluding a true one. About an inferior piece, “Young Ronald” (304), Kittredge quotes Professor Child:

“If any lover of ballads should feel his understanding insulted by the presentation of such a piece as this, I can have no quarrel with him. There is certainly much in it that is exasperating,—the greeters in the school, the lifting of the hat, and, most of all, perhaps, the mint in the meadows. These are, however, the writer’s own property; the nicking with nay and the giant are borrowed from romances. In this and not a very few other cases, I have suppressed disgust, and admitted an actually worthless and manifestly—at least in part—spurious ballad, because of the remote possibility that it might contain relics, or be a debased representative, of something genuine and better” (Sargent and Kittredge 62).

In drawing conclusions about Child in terms of his collection, it is helpful to look at his life. Child’s conduct and attitudes toward his family of wife and four daughters is especially relevant to this study about ballad women. So, too, are Child’s several friendships with women. Evidence of Child’s relationships with women, those in his family and outside it, is found in his personal correspondence, especially that with James Russell Lowell (The Scholar Friend) and that with a young lady known as “M” (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady). To both Lowell and “M”, Child speaks of his pleasure in reading to his girls. In 1867, while Lowell is ambassador to Spain, Child writes to him, “I am reading Don Quixote now to the girls and they are enjoying it as I wanted my offspring to do. It never was half so delightful before.” [Child, The Scholar Friends 40] Twenty-eight years later, Child writes to “M”, wishing that he could join his
daughters in their reading: “Were I made a man of leisure for a year or two, I could read
the best books with my girls, bring up my Dante to an advanced point—I used to read
Dante with my wife and occasionally others in Stockbridge” (A Scholar's Letters to a
Young Lady 146). From his letters we can see that Child encouraged and appreciated the
intellectual pursuits of his daughters and wife. A letter written to “M” in 1889 indicates
that reading aloud to the family was a nightly custom (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young
Lady 72). Throughout the letters to “M”, Child asks what she is reading and studying,
assuming an attitude paternal, not patronizing.

In one of his letters to “M”, Child speaks of his objects of inspiration, or, as he
puts it, “superstitions,” which he enumerates as “love of women, roses (including apple-
blossoms), popular poetry, Shakspere, my friends, wild flowers, trees, violin music,
voila!” (A Scholar's Letters to a Young Lady vi.). Accordingly, Child’s wife, in writing
to “M” shortly after Child’s death, states: “He always had, from the beginning of my
knowledge of him, friendships with women, at first near his own age, with whom he
habitually corresponded, and whose letters came like fresh breezes from without, and
then, as time went on, with younger friends” (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady vii).
Still, despite his regard for both beauty and intellect in women, Child was a man of his
time and years. In writing to Lowell in 1879, Child expresses dismay over the fact that
Wentworth Higginson had been nominated for faculty office at Harvard. Child objects,
“We could not do better than nominate Wentworth Higginson. I for one had much to
swallow. He will be sure to agitate for woman’s suffrage” (The Scholar Friends 43).
Child then goes on to tell Lowell that Higginson has responded to Francis Parkman’s
response to Higginson’s activism comes from an idea of what is appropriate for a
Harvard professor, but one cannot overlook the more literal interpretation, indicating
Child’s views of gender differences. In contrast to his account of colleague Higginson’s
work for and with women, Child writes approvingly, though jokingly, of colleague
William James. He says he is enclosing for “M” a lecture of James’ and then goes on:

Will has lately taken to giving lectures, or speeches, at girls’ colleges, and
is fascinated with his hearers, whom he tells me that he addresses with
unrestrained affectionate flattery. He will go anywhere to give a lecture to girls,
he says. There are enough girls in the country to keep him tolerably busy if this
gets out. So far I think he has had this pleasure only twice. (A Scholar’s Letters
148).

Though his habit of placing the honorific Miss or Mrs. before a woman author’s
name may seem condescending to us in the present, Child, in writing to a young woman,
no doubt, wished only to show proper respect. What matters more is the fact that Child
demonstrates a fondness for women authors. Throughout the letters to “M”, Child shows
his varied literary interests. In 1887 he notes that he had been reading “Mrs. Gaskell’s
‘Wives and Daughters,’ [sic] . . . [in which] there are two girls, not quite old enough for
one to care passionately for, . . . but I like them both and have forgotten troubles over
them” (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 59). In another letter, written in 1889, Child
tells “M”, “I finished a book of Miss Woolson’s last evening—‘Rodman, the Keeper, and
Other Tales.’ Did I mention it to you? There are three or four very good things in it” (A
Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 75). Then in 1895, in a Christmas letter to “M”, Child
writes, “I have gone back to reading Miss Austen in the evenings, with more enjoyment
than ever" (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 148). In an earlier letter, Child refers to George Eliot’s Middlemarch while telling “M”, of a beloved flower:

The virgilia is a very tender object to me. I salute it every time I pass, and take the tender tips of its fingers in my hands. It is not entirely insensible to my admiration, but has a most virginal superiority. I should have also been in love with Dorothea Brooke . . . if she had not married that moldy Casaubon. (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 99)

Similarly, in a still earlier letter, Child had written to “M” of women literary characters, an explanation that may give us insights into Child’s attitude toward his women ballad characters. In 1885, Child wrote the following to “M”, who was reading a new edition of Shakespeare’s plays:

Those plays have enriched the world more than all books taken together. Who can spare Portia, Miranda, Helena, Desdemona, Cordelia, Viola, Rosalind, even though he has been so placed as to know L., M., R., S.? And what should those poor bodies do who have not known and never can know an L., an M., an R., an S.? How much we often would give to know intimately a sweet woman whom we see at a concert or meet in the street! And no one is cut off by fate from knowing Portia except the few that are cut off from reading English. Those who have not the honor of visiting the Belmonts are welcome at Belmont. Perdita will give a flower to anyone that will come to her sheep-shearing. Not only do we get our ideals from Hermiones and Juliets and Celia, but we interpret our lovers and friends through them. They open our dull eye—we men’s—to nobleness, graces,
and charms, which else we should have missed. *(A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 25-26)*

His view of gender differences between men, with their dull eye, and women, with nobleness, graces and charms, are further elaborated in Child’s correspondence. Despite his apparent objections to women’s suffrage, Child’s words do not show him to find feminine characteristics to be undesirable. To the contrary, about his friend Lowell he writes of the poet shortly after Lowell’s death: ‘I have been looking over his letters today. He sometimes had a woman’s fond way of phrasing, though he was not effusive’ *(A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 111)*. Moreover, in speaking of gender difference, Child apologizes to ‘M’ for not having written a letter to her fit to match the last one she sent him. Child attributes his faults to masculine nature, as he begins his letter:

> What a clumsy thing a man is altogether, but most of all unbefehlen, as the airy German says when he writes a letter. This reflection is called forth by the reading of your light-touched sketch of the dinner. Men are all Germans: it is of no use to make distinctions among the flat-footed, heavy-fisted creatures. There is a Breton bretonnant, and a Breton pas bretonnant, but a man is a man for a’ that. Well may you say that you expect a fat letter from one of them. *(A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 39)*

Still, despite his joking claim that his German nature prevents him from writing a letter worthy of ‘M’’s correspondence, about himself Child expresses his sense of his own androgyny as he later writes to ‘M’ about a former student:

> My only event has been a letter from an old pupil of 40 years ago, telling me that he had had a dim daguerreotype which I had given him, enlarged and
copied in photograph, and if the copy he sends calls up half the pleasant memories which it does with him, etc.—This was a very bright and handsome boy whom I loved passionately—loved like an aunt! (A Scholar’s Letters to a Young Lady 70).

Having found Child to be one who admired and befriended intellectual women, who found inspiration in literary heroines, and who expressed androgyny with humor, but no embarrassment, one can conclude that Child was not a blatant misogynist. Misogyny within the ballad collection, then, may, then, have more to do with what was available for Child to collect than with not his own tastes or proclivities.

The subject matter in the ballads is not the stuff of popular literature circulated in polite society, that is to say, the sort of society that might be expected to read Child’s collected ballads. In those ballads, however, characters engage in taboo activities such as incest and mutilation with remarkable frequency. In the 305 ballads in the Child collection, men are victims in 87, while women are victims in 56. Women are the victims of men, however, in 49 of those 56, while men are victims of women in only fifteen ballads. Women ballad characters can be the victims of tragic indignities such as rape, incest, and mutilation, but men ballad characters are not as likely to appear as victims of indignity at the hands of women, indicating the power relationship between men and women in the fictional world of the ballad. The fact that victimization of women is so pervasive may explain why Child does not remark it. Then too, it is likely that Child, as Lacanian father, makes the shocking victimization ballads safe for readers’ consumption within the confines of the collection. In the Lacanian sense, Child, as a benevolent father, has tamed the wild things by placing them in his printed volumes.
In this ballad of relatively mild victimization, a woman is subjected to vulgar insults and embarrassment. In “The Earl of Errol” (231) a wife seeks a divorce. In the divorce proceedings she attempts to prove that hers is not a consummated marriage because she has borne no children. Her husband produces his heir by another woman, proving that he is neither sterile nor impotent. In winning his case, the irate husband declares that she will not get back her dowry, adding this message to his wife:

‘Now hold your tongue, ye whorish bitch
Sae loud as I year ye lie!

(Child 4.284.24)¹

Though the next chapter will deal more fully with the treatment of women character’s bodies, especially with their mutilation, a comparison of male and female victimization is apt here. Men victims in “Lord Randal” (12) and “Edward” (13) meet with the relative quiet murder at the hands of women, but other male ballad characters die by more overtly violent means at the hands of men. Child Maurice in “Child Maurice” (83) is beheaded because a jealous husband thinks he is the lover of the jealous husband’s wife. This domestic tragedy ballad version A unfolds with these lines:

Then hee pulled ffforth his bright browne sword,
And dried itt on his sleeue,
And the fffirst good stroke John Stewart stroke,
Child Maurice head he did cleeue.
And he pricked itt on his swords poynt,
Went singing there beside,
And sayes, Dost thou know Child Maurice head,
If that thou dost itt see?
And lapp itt soft, and kisse itt offe,
    Ffor thou louest him better than mee.
But when shee looked on Child Maurice head,
    Shee neuer spake words but three:
    'I neuer beare no child but one,
    And you haue slaine him trulye.'

(Child 2.266.27-30)

In “Child Maurice” (83), sympathy lies with the victimized mothers and butchered son as it does also in “Captain Car, or, Edom O Gordon” (178A). In the absence of the lord of the house, the lady holds off a siege by Captain Car, who mutilates the lady’s firstborn son in an effort to get her to relinquish the estate. Of the mutilation and demand the ballad states.

    The captayne sayd unto him selfe;
        Wyth spek, before the rest,
        He cut his tonge out of his head,
        His hart out of his brest

(Child 3.430.16)

Lord Hamilton dreams that his family and household are in danger, but arrives too late to save them from burning. Thus, both male and female characters are victims.

3 Child ballads quoted come from the five-volume set of Child ballads, documented as follows and cited parenthetically within the text, unless indicated otherwise: Francis James Child, The English and Scottish
Child again presents without comment another man victimizing a man in "Lady Diamond" (269A). Lady Daisy’s father becomes outraged when he discovers that his daughter is in love with the little kitchen boy. The ballad continues.

They hae taen out this bonnie boy’s heart,

Put it in a cup o gold;

‘Take that to Lady Daisy,’ he said

‘For she’s impudent and bold;

And she wash’d it with the tears that ran

From her eye

Into the cup of gold

(Child 5.35.8).

As Lacanian father, Child’s not commenting on the victim theme may indicate that by placing the ballads within his collection he has made them “safe” for readers who otherwise might be shocked by the ballad stories. “Child Owlet” (291) presents an even more violent death, this time of a man who is the victim of a woman. Child Owlet who refuses to cuckold his uncle spurns Lady Erskine. For revenge, the lady makes it look as if Child Owlet has attempted to rape her. His punishment is drawing and quartering, as the ballad reads,

They put a foal to ilka foot,

And ane to ilka hand,

And sent them down to Darling muir,

As fast as they cou’d gang.

There was not a kow in Darling muir,
    Nor ae piece o a rind,
    But drappit o Childe Owlet's blude
    And pieces o his skin.

There was not a kow in Darling muir,
    Nor ae piece o a rash,
    But drappit o Childe Owlet's blude
    And pieces o his flesh.

(Child 5.157.10-2).

Other male victims of a woman are found in “The Fire of Freendraught” (196). After
long hostility, Lady Freendraught invites Lard John and Rothiemay to spend the night in
her castle. They accept, acknowledging the hospitality as a sign of truce, only to awaken
in the night surrounded by flame, inasmuch as the lady has burned her own castle to be
rid of her enemies.

In “Brown Adam” (98A), a false knight courts Brown Adam’s faithful wife,
leading to the false knight’s becoming victim to Brown Adam’s sword in a ballad which
Lacanian father Child perhaps makes more palatable by presenting it in written form.
When the false knight will not take no for an answer, Brown Adam appears, brandishing
his sword to emphasize his wife’s conviction. Although the false knight quickly
complies, asking to leave his bow as pledge of his vow to leave Brown’s wife alone,
Brown seeks a more compelling token, as the ballad ends, “He’s gard him leave a better
pledge, /Four fingers o his right han” (Sargent and Kittredge 208). Still another husband
appears in “Young Waters” (94). Young Waters rides into town in grandeur. The king asks his wife to tell him who is the fairest of the company. She answers that Young Waters is the fairest, but her husband is offended that she did not except him. She responds that the king is “neither laird nor lord” and therefore not among the choices, but the jealous king considers that a mere technicality. He orders Waters to be executed before his own wife and child. The mere appearance of the courtly love affair can bring death to the lovers (Lutz 43).

Granted, male characters are victimized on a continuum ranging from indignities to atrocities, but they do not suffer in greater severity than their female counterparts. Of the ballads in which women are victims, many have to do with sex, four having to do with the taboo topic of incest, its presentation made acceptable within the covers of a scholarly text.

“Sheath and Knife” (16A) begins,

It is talked the world all over,

The brume blooms bonnie and says it is fair

That the king’s dochter goes wi child to her

brither (Child 1.185.1).

Brother and sister go to their father’s deer park where the sister prevails upon the brother to shoot his arrow when she has turned her back and given a cry. When she is dead, the brother buries her with her baby at her feet. Then at home, when asked why he appears in pain, he answers, “I have lost a sheath and knife that I’ll never see again.” Similarly, in “The Bonny Hind” (50) it is the sister who seeks to die rather than live with the shame of incest. A young lord encounters a young lady in “the gardens so green.” They make
love and only afterward discover that they are long-separated brother and sister. He buries his sister beneath the hollin tree. When their father comes along and asks why his son is crying, he answers that he mourns his bonny hind. The father replies,

‘O were ye at your sister’s bower,

Your sister fair to see,

Ye’ll think na mair o your bonny hyn

Beneath the hollin tree’ (Child 1.447.17).

By including in his volumes the incest ballads, Child as father grants license to his readers/children to think about the unthinkable. A ballad quite similar to "The Bonny Hind," in that it contains the incest theme, (50) is "The King’s Dochter Lady Jean" (52A). Lady Jean decides to put away her needlework to go to the greenwood to shake the nuts from the trees. There she encounters a courteous young man who becomes her lover. After the sexual encounter they discover that they are brother and sister, he being much older and having been away at sea. Lady Jean punctures her heart with her pen knife but lives long enough to go home and speak to her family. When asked about her apparently weak condition, she replies,

‘O late yestreen, as I cam hame,

Doun by yon castil wa,

O heavy, heavy was the stane

That on my briest did fa’ (Child 1.451.18)

The ballad then concludes,

Her brither he cam trippin doun the stair,

His steps they were fu slow;
He sank into his sister's arms,

And they died as white as snav (Child 1.451.19).

The brother in “Lizzie Wan” (51A) responds very differently to his sister/lover. When Lizzie tells her brother that she is carrying his child, he responds as follows:

‘And hast thou tald father and mother o that?
And hast thou tald sae o me?’

And he has drawn his gude braid sword,
That hang down by his knee.

And he has cutted aff Lizzie Wan’s head,

And her fair body in three (Child 1.448.5-6)

After decapitating his sister and mutilating her body, he goes to his mother’s bower where he answers his mother that the blood she sees on him has come from his cutting off his greyhound’s head. Finally, he declares that he is banishing himself forever, saying, in version B “‘The sun and the moon shall dance on the green/ That night when I come hame’” (Child 1.448.12).

Perhaps one should not be surprised to find sex prevalent in ballads, but one might be surprised to find elements of courtly love (where courtly love is defined as the elaborate game leading to an illicit affair) in ballads where victims appear. The love theme in both ballad and romance may be explained by T. F. Henderson, who implies a common ancestry of love in the ballads and love in the courtly romances. He explains, “The tales of love which they [the ballads] essay to set forth are evidently old tales, tales of bygone generations, tales which derive their interest from the fact that they represent a
condition of society that is strange to the listener" (31). Though Henderson’s explanation is perhaps dated today, it helps explain why the ballads of the common folk are peopled with highborn lords and ladies who behave in the courtly fashion.

In all the ballads with courtly love elements, the ballads, unlike the aristocratic romances, penetrate beyond the artificiality of courtly conventions to the real-life world where victimization takes place. They cut through the process of sublimation present in the courtly rules to show the libidinous desires hidden by the artifices of courtly love, the artifices of lover’s performing elaborate feats to impress his lady. The ballad, unlike the romances, show that the ultimate end of the courtly game is the unacceptable sex act, with its attendant consequences.

After noting that love is the theme in a large number of ballads, Henderson goes on to describe a type of inescapable passion found in the ballads that is quite like the passion of the courtly lover who is subject to the God of Love. "It is viewed as unamenable to restraint, and it is oftener its tragic than its joyous aspect that is set forth. What the ballad chiefly exemplifies is the strength, the supremacy, the fatefulness of the passion..."(30).

In some of the ballads, and in two of those that show the women as victims, the fatalistic love is presented in terms of the courtly tradition. C. S. Lewis enumerates the characteristics of courtly love as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is obedient to his lady’s wishes as a knight is to the wishes of his lord (2). Although the ballads do not mention the Religion of Love, the other elements are present in the Child ballads considered here: the lovers must be of noble birth; the man must "court" the lady with praise, gifts, general courtesy, or a quest; and the love must be
illicit, leading to the sex act. Some of the Child ballads are satiric, exposing the elaborateness of courtly love as it tries to disguise its true motive, forbidden sex. The remaining courtly love ballads treat the theme seriously, all ending with the tragic death of at least one of the lovers.

Through Child’s collection one can see the victims of love are wont to victimize each other to reach their goals. Ballads in which the lover is spurned show the ladies to be something less than worthy of the adoration the courtly tradition applies. Perhaps if the gentlemen had not given up the courtly game so easily, they would have won their ladies, one might think. But the Jealous Husband ballads, such as “Young Waters” (94) treated above, show that, even when the lover follows the courtly rules to the letter, the love affair still ends in tragedy. Both ladies and lords appears as victims.

In the ballads Child has collected, the ballad world of the common people is real, not metaphorical or allegorical. An actual man makes love to an actual woman. The lovers make their decisions and must face the consequences. Women who have sexual intercourse may become pregnant. Lovers who decide to visit their ladies may be killed by jealous husbands along with the ladies themselves. Lovers, male or female, who give themselves over to the whims of their beloved, may be spurned. This is reality—far different from the courtly romance’s world. Perhaps Child as Lacanian father presents these ballads to teach his audience how to live out their lives, to show how art can be efficacious as was a tacit intent of his project of preserving the ballads for posterity.

Child allows the reader to examine the courtly love theme, noting the various victims among the characters. Following the courtly love theme one can view all characters as victims in “Old Robin of Portingale” (80A). In the ballad an old man takes
a young wife, expecting to live “in quietnesse /With her all the dayes of his liffe” (Child 2.240.1) The young bride has other ideas. The ballad says,

They had not in their wed-bed laid,

Scarcely were both on sleepe,

But ypp she rose, and forth shee goes

To Sir Gyles, and fast can weepe (Child 2.240.3).

As the perfect courtly lover, Sir Gyles asks, “Lady, what is your will?” She then tells him of her plot to bring her cousins, twenty-four knights, to murder the old husband. Gyles, of course, cannot refuse his lady. Unfortunately, a little footpage, the ubiquitous tattler in so many ballads, tells Old Robin the plot, and Robin plans a counterattack. He pretends to be ill close to death, in order to set the trap. When the attackers come, Old Robin kills them. When the lady comes to bring Sir Gyles a drink in reward for having killed Old Robin, she meets her husband instead. Then she sees the Old Robin has hacked Sir Gyles to pieces. In his fury, Old Robin makes his lady his victim, also, by cutting off her paps and then her ears. She, of course, dies, and Old Robin, after making the tattling footpage his heir, cuts a cross into his own shoulder and penitently goes on a crusade to the Holy Lands.

Another ballad with courtly love elements with their attendant victimization is “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard” (81A), which presents a similar story of infidelity. When Lady Barnard sees Little Musgrave at church, she invites him to come to her bower. Musgrave, the true knight, cannot refuse:

Quoth he, “I thank yee, faire, lady,

This kindnes thou showest to me;
But whether it be to my wewal or woe,

This night I will lig with thee” (Child 2.244.7).

As usual, a footpage appears to tell Lord Barnard: “Little Musgrave is at Bucklesfordbery /A bed with thy own wedded wife!” (Child 2.244.10). Barnard, of course, rides to Bucklesforbery. Little Musgrave hears Lord Barnard’s horn and has time to escape but he is tied to the code of doing his lady’s will. She chides him by saying,

“Lye still, lye still, thou Little Musgrave,
And huggell me from the cold;
‘Tis nothing but a shepherd’s boy,
A driving his sheep to the fold.

Is not thy hawke upon a perch?
Thy steed eats oats and hay;
And thou a fair lady in thin armes,
And wouldst thou bee away?” (Child 2.244-5.16-7)

When Lord Barnard finds the lovers, he behaves in a much more chivalrous manner than did Old Robin. First he asks Musgrave to clothe himself because he does not want to ruin his own reputation by killing a naked man. Although Barnard gives Musgrave the better sword for the duel, Lord Barnard wins. Lady Barnard says she will pray only for Musgrave and never for Barnard, angering her husband so much that he cuts off her paps. He is immediately remorseful for having killed “the bravest sir knight and the fairest lady.” He finally has the lovers buried together, saying, “But lay my lady on the upper hand, /For she came o the better kin” (Child 245.29). Thus, this ballad takes swipes at
the superficiality of the courtly love conventions while showing the woman character to be the victim of grisly mutilation, in a scene that Child’s distanced presentation allows the reader to see without being traumatized.

Though never moralizing, Child as father presents his ballads. Those ballads treated above take the theme of courtly love from the fantasy world of the aristocratic romances to show the consequences of living out the courtly code. Rather than present a didactic moral, the ballads, by their tragic endings, demonstrate the futility of a love that cannot succeed no matter how much the lovers wish it. No one gets away with an illicit love affair no matter how much he disguises the true nature of the relationship in the trappings of the courtly code.

Similar to the courtly love theme is that of sexual fidelity, which gives emphasis to the women character’s corporeal nature, a nature that yields the unfair consequences of the sexual double standard, a standard Child’s collection, like victimization, presents without comment. The shame of being cuckolded belongs to the man who cannot control his wife rather than to the wife herself, in this ballad, indicating that women characters are not expected to possess the same sense of morals as are men. Women cannot control themselves; therefore, it is the duty of a husband to control his wife. Failure to protect his possession from use by other men is more his failure than the failure of the wife.

In “The Boy and the Mantle” (29) the issue of fidelity centers on husbands being cuckolded more than it focuses on the wife herself. A child comes to Arthur’s court, bringing with him a magic mantle that changes colors and shapes when placed upon a woman who has been unfaithful. One by one, beginning with Gueneuer, the ladies of the court fail and are disgraced by the willful mantle. When on Craddocke’s wife the mantle
rests gently “Seemelye of colour, /Glittering like gold;” (1.273.31), Gueneuer protests.

To this protest the boy responds,

‘. . .King, chasten thy wiffe;

of her words shee is to bold.

‘Shee is a bitch and a witch,

and a whore bold;

King, in thine owne hall

Thou art a cuckold’ (Child 1.273.35-6).

Being cuckold is also at issue in “Queen Eleanor’s Confession” (156A). The ballad begins,

Queen Eleanor was a sick woman.

And afraid that she should dye;

Then she sent for two frysers of France,

For to speak with them speedily. (Child 3.258.1)

When the king has summoned his nobles, Earl Martial speaks privately to him vowing that he will maintain the queen’s secrets if the king will go along with his scheme that they two disguise themselves as the French friars to hear the queen’s confession. The king agrees. The first sin the queen confesses was that Earl Martial had her maidenhead when she first came to court. Then she confesses to having poisoned Fair Rosamond. With the recitation of each sin, the ballad shows the response as follows:

‘That is a vile sin,’ then said the king,

‘God may forgive it thee!’

With a heavy heart then spoke he (Child 3.259.15).

After the men have revealed their identity to the queen, she wrings her hands, saying she has been betrayed. Rather than threaten her with punishment, the ballad shows the king’s response this way:

The king lookd over his left shoulder,

And a grim look looked he,

And said, Earl Martial, but for my oath,

Then hanged shouldst thou be.

(Child 3.259.20)

Apparently, if the indiscretion may be kept secret, the ballad world may allow it to go unpunished.

The ballad “Gil Brenton” (5), however, shows graver consequences for the woman who is not chaste. The ballad begins, “Gil Brenton has sent oue the fame, /He woo’d a wife an brought her hame” (Child 1.68.1). The new bride learns that Gil Brenton, through the agency of his witch-like mother, has tested seven brides before and has sent them home mutilated because they were not maidens. The ballad reads,

‘Seven king’s daughters has our king wedded,

An seven king’s daughters has our king bedded.

‘But he’s cutted the paps fae their breast-bane,

An sent them mourning hame again’ (Child 1.68.17-8)
The new wife is also not a maid, and is, in fact, pregnant with the child of a young man she had met in the greenwood. When Gil Brenton’s mother ascertains that her new daughter-in-law is with child, she confronts the young woman. The young woman explains that her lover presented her with tokens, a gold ring, a pen knife, and a lock of yellow hair. When Gil Brenton’s mother sees the tokens, she presents them to her son as proof to him that he was his new bride’s lover and the father of her baby. The ballad ends happily this way, indicating that a marriage between lovers purifies their once illicit act:

Now oar a month was come and gone,
This lady bare a bonny young son.

An it was well written on his breastbane
‘Gil Brenton is my father’s name’ (Child 1.70.73-4).

Anyone who has read the Child collection in order from the first ballad through the three hundred fifth will, no doubt, agree that the quality diminishes, especially with those artifacts recorded from nineteenth-century written sources. From such a linear reading it is apparent that Child viewed his work as that of the preservationist, the archivist, and that he thereby aligns himself with the anthropological folklorists in that regard. (The term folklore “was first used by W. J. Thoms in the middle of the nineteenth century as a substitute for ‘popular antiquities.’”) (Holman 206). From the standpoint of Lacanian analysis, one can see Child’s apparently successful attempt to find and bring forth all the true ballads to be Child’s way of putting all the objects under his paternal authority. Child thereby inserts his name in the blank left by the anonymous fathers—
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UMI
CHAPTER TWO

WOMAN’S BODY IN CHILD’S BODY OF WORK

Despite the fact that Child thought his work would close the door on ballad collecting, its publication had quite the opposite effect. William McCarthy reminds us that for Child, balladry was a “closed account.” As mentioned earlier, Child believed that ballads were no longer being made and that he therefore could in fact gather them all into a definitive edition, a permanent collection of all the English and Scottish ballads that had ever been or ever would be. By collecting all the ballads extant, Child was acting out what was for the Victorians, and arguably for all men, the very attractive rescue fantasy: Child assumed the role of Perseus, rescuing the beautiful Andromeda embodied in the ballads. Adrienne Auslander Munich in Andromeda’s Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art, explains:

Rescue fantasies, a staple of everyday dream life, frequently follow simple narrative lines that hide the complexity of individual motives. Labeling the rescue fantasy universal and oedipal, Bruno Bettelheim asserts, “no little boy has ever failed to see himself in this starring role.” Although for grown men of the Victorian period, even men of reason and probity, rescue fantasies assume the dual aspect of private fantasy and national (even nationalistic) obsession, an examination of different Victorian representations of Perseus in the context of other Victorian rescue fantasies makes a problem rather than a blessing of that starring male role. But the reiteration of what might seem a private fantasy also
requires cultural analysis when it is shared, passed around as an agreed-upon tale, transmitted from one man to another, painted and written and confessed to. Thus, the Andromeda myth becomes a Victorian tradition (14).

Though the Perseus fantasy does not explain in full Child’s motive for rescuing the ballads, it does give insight, showing him to be typical of his time.

McCarthy goes on to allow that Child has indeed provided us with all the ballads of value collected before 1880. Contrary to Child’s expectation, however, “one of the first results of the publication of this definitive statement of a closed account was a reopening of the account. Ballad collecting flourished” (2). Though McCarthy finds that Child had found all the worthwhile examples that had already been collected by 1880, the collection contains several works whose presence there puzzle modern ballad students. Most selections are understandable; still others give one pause to question why they are there among the chosen 305. Ballad Index editor Bob Waltz remarked to subscribers to the ballad listserv that some of Child’s selections are questionable [not really ballads or not really traditional] and others are, frankly, “silly.”

It is not the purpose of this work to certify as authentic the status of works within the Child collection. Rather it is the collection itself that provides the subject. For this work, the Child collection is not merely a catalog, but a coherent work itself, a canonical text readable as any text is readable, under the scrutiny of literary critical theory. Child makes his choices, and those choices compose the text.

A superficial reading of the Child text might lead one to conclude that it merely follows the Victorian penchant for ascribing corporeality to the feminine, while reserving mentality to the masculine, but to read the text thus is to read it with post-eighteenth
century spectacles, not post-modern ones. If one deconstructs the text, one may see that
even if Child himself wore masculine Victorian spectacles (as he literally did), the works
in his text subvert his view. In the Child text, 200 of the 305 selections have women
characters. Remarkably, of those 200 with women characters, 103 contain references to a
woman character’s body. Such a preponderance of the appearance of woman’s body is
telling. Even if Child himself had been so proper a Victorian as to wish to devalue the
body, the works appearing belie such propriety. If indeed he were to privilege the mental
over the physical, Child cannot be faulted inasmuch as almost everyone living after The
Enlightenment (with its Cartesian cogito) does. Elizabeth Grosz, in Volatile Bodies:
Toward a Corporeal Feminism, notes that even feminists themselves have been complicit
in devaluing the body. She speaks of “the pervasive, unspoken assumptions regarding the
body in the history of modern philosophy and in conceptions of knowledge,” concluding,
“Insofar as feminist theory uncritically takes over these common assumptions, it
participates in the social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the
oppression of women” (10). Jane Gallop, in Thinking through the Body, presents a
complex and compelling argument about the violence implicit in the mind-body split, (4)
a violence perhaps laid bare by the ballad texts. In The Less Noble Sex: Scientific,
Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman’s Nature, Nancy Tuana recounts the
following:

  a recurring theme in scientific, religious, and philosophical conceptions of
woman’s nature: that woman is less developed, less moral, less capable of
rational thought, and less divine than man because of her role in reproduction.

One would then expect that in the realm of procreation, woman would be seen as
man's equal, if not his superior. However, section three [of Tuana's book] chronicles systematic deprecation of the female creative force in both religious cosmogonies and scientific theories of reproduction; these beliefs present the male creative force as more potent than that of the female. (xi).

By contrast, the ballads do not devalue the body to elevate the mind, the spirit, or the soul. Contrary to what one might expect from presumably Christian authors and audiences, the corporeal life is all one finds in the ballads, save a handful. One sees this clearly if one contrasts the ballads with the courtly love theme treated earlier in this work.

At just the time this work brings about a reexamination of Child's work, both literary criticism and sociology are engaged in widespread reexaminations of the meaning(s) of the human body. Chris Shilling, in The Body and Social Theory, tells that sociologists are now examining the body and therefore seeing that the issues sociology has formerly studied are themselves embodied:

The concern of classical sociology with the body has all too frequently been implicit, rather than explicit. Furthermore, it has tended to focus selectively on certain aspects of human embodiment. For example, sociology has focused on such issues as language and consciousness without recognizing that these capacities are themselves embodied (9).

Shilling's work, then, is to bring forth a frame by which sociology may study the body.

At the same time, Peter Brooks, in Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative, presents an account of what has been going on in literary criticism, especially in the field of narratology, as Brooks explains how narrative writing is both about and motivated by the body, as he explains:
In this book I consider the body as an object and motive of narrative writing—as a primary, driving concern of the life of the imagination. As I go along, I pay increasing attention to visual representations of the body, since viewing the body is of persistent importance in literature as well as other arts. My main concern throughout is with the creation of fictions that address the body, that imbed it in narrative, and that therefore embody meanings: stories on the body and the body in story (xi).

With the words of both Shilling and Brooks within our memories, it becomes easier to see Child's work in terms of the new school of sociological folklorists and also in terms of the new narratologists, 305 folk narratives, 103 with female bodies as their topics. Brooks notes that "the question of the body in literature is particularly interesting because of the apparent distance and tension between the two, an irreducible tension between 'nature' and 'culture', that coexists with the sense that the two are interdependent" (1). Then, too it may also be said that the ballad is that twilight zone where nature and culture coexist with the sense that the two are interdependent. The narrative of a ballad is a natural being in the way a signed narrative is not, or so, at least, Child thought. Does the ballad's status as a "spontaneous work of nature" therefore make it more ripe for containing the body, or does the preponderance of body representations in the Child collection reflect the collector's inclination to impose his signature on the unsigned works he had appropriated for himself? Perhaps an examination of some of the 103 ballads with female bodies as their topics will bring an answer.

After looking at the Child collection to regard its treatment of woman's body—including the issues of virginity, midwifery, motherhood in general including
infanticide, incest, chastity, adultery, rape, political implications of woman's body, nakedness, the gaze, and mutilation—it may be helpful to turn to folklorist Katherine Young’s work, Bodylore. Young states, “Bodylore explores the way discourses navigate the body and the way the body anchors discourses.” She states further:

representations of the body, in words as well as objects, can be inspected to reveal notions of embodiment. It is these perspectives that folklore contributes to the investigations of the body emerging in anthropology and history, literature and psychoanalysis, philosophy and communication, semiology and psychology, performance theory and cultural studies, feminism and sociology, aesthetics and critical theory.

With Young's work in mind, I submit this work on the Child collection offers an opportunity to consider the preponderance of female bodies presented there, those 103 ballads out of the total 200 where women characters appear. The material from which ballad stories are made—pregnancy or the lack thereof, incest, mutilation—are subjects that become the stuff of popular transmission. There is something in the folk, folk in the broad sense that Dundes uses to define it, that makes people interested in stories about women's bodies. Therefore it is no surprise that Child, who was from all accounts a scholar of Victorian probity and care, was seduced, much as ballads audiences, past and present, apparently have been, by the preponderance of women's bodies in his own collection. In his effort to make himself the master of all the works before him, the Lacanian father, has himself been taken under their spell as have the rest of us who view his work with him.
Not surprisingly, eighty-four of those 103 ballads about women's bodies are about sex. Forty-one Child ballads turn on the fact of a character's being pregnant or not. Unlike the metrical romances where lovers may engage in illicit love, episode after episode, with fear only of being discovered, not fear of bearing a child, or so it seems, the ballad women who have sexual relations invariably become pregnant. Though a ballad woman may go to lengths to avoid being impregnated, once a man "has taken her by the middle so small," as the line goes, one can count on her going into labor nine months later. Though such an observation may lend itself to questions concerning contraception among the ballad community than to this work at hand, it is significant to note that a woman character who would be called in today's terms "sexually active" would surely become a mother. Motherhood for ballad characters is no less complex nor ambiguous than it has proven to be over the centuries in real life. If we can generalize at all, it is to say that the sentimentalized Victorian vision of mother is not the ballad mother.

If one were to pinpoint ballad motherhood in time, it might have more in common with the medieval period than with other times. Child himself believed the ballads were medieval in origin, and certainly the lords and ladies, whether contemporary with the making of the ballads in which they appear or not, are meant to evoke that time. Clarissa Atkinson, in *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, explains at length the construction of motherhood, the body of notions making up what it meant to be a mother. Atkinson observes:

> Interactions between the history of Christianity and the history of motherhood have been intense and complicated, perhaps in part because Christianity is a religion of embodiment—of Incarnation—whose god entered
history as a human being, ate and drank with men and women on earth, was born and died like them. Physicality or embodiment—birth and death—lay at the heart of the faith of those who accepted the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And physicality necessarily lies at the heart of constructions of motherhood in any society. Our wishes, fears, and fantasies about embodiment are inextricably linked to our experience of mothers and notions of maternity. (5)

On one hand, women of the Middle Ages were reminded of Eve the Mother of All, from whom evil entered the world, and of the Virgin, from whom salvation from that evil issued.

Of more interest than ballads dealing with motherhood one might suppose, to those schooled in recent critical theory, would be those ballads that involve the gaze. Through the gaze, says Laura Mulvey, men view women as objects, imposing an I-it relationship. Accordingly, as discussed earlier, Victorian feminist theorist Helena Michie reminds us that woman is associated with the Other, that which is the object of a gaze. Several ballads show the gaze in operation, with the most overt ballad of the class being, arguably, “The Whummil Bore” (27). It is interesting, in particular, to note that Child chooses to include it in his first two volumes where, as he stated in his correspondence, the best works were. Kittredge questions its inclusion as a ballad by writing, “This ballad, if it ever were one, seems not to have been met with, or at least to have been thought worth notice, by anybody but Motherwell” [Child’s collection relies on Motherwell’s MS as well as other MSS.] (46). Yet, Child places it at the front of his collection. In the “Whummil Bore” (27) a first person narrator—a feature remarkable,
also—recites that for seven long years he never got sight of the king’s daughter, and that once was through a whummil bore (a drilled hole). The narrator relates:

I saw her thro a whummil bore,
And I neer got a sight of her no more.

Twa was putting on her gown,
And ten was putting pins therein.

Twa was putting on her shoon,
And twa was buckling them again.

Five was combing down her hair,
And I never got a sight of her nae mair.

Her neck and breast was like the snow,
Then from the bore I was forced to go.

(Child 1.255.2-6)

From this one inclusion of the gaze theme, it is perhaps inappropriate to speculate upon Child’s motive without looking at the other examples. It does, however, appear that by including so many ballads about woman’s body he found the subject interesting and appropriate for his collection. Perhaps he found “Whummil Bore” comical. Other ballads pertaining to a woman’s nakedness, or near nakedness, treat the condition as a cause of shame.
Except for "Whummil Bore," the ballads that involve a woman character's naked body in the gaze of male characters show the woman's shame, indicative of her ruin. In "The Fair Flower of Northumberland" (9), again a work collected in volume one, the married lover of the Fair Flower of Northumberland disgraces the Fair Flower, sending her home in shame to her father, naked. The "Boy and the Mantle" (29) continues the theme of nakedness as a sign of woman's shame as the men of Arthur's court are allowed to gaze on the unchaste ladies as a defiled objects. A boy comes into King Arthur's court with a magic mantle that will stay down only on the body of a chaste lady. All the ladies of the court are tried. When Gueneuer fails the test, the little boy says,

'Shee is a bitch and a witch

and a whore bold;

King in thine own hall

thou art a cuchold.'

(Child 1.273.36)

Only one lady passes the test, Craddocke's wife, who confesses to having kissed Craddocke before they were married.

Also subjected to men's gaze and therefore objectified is the hapless lady in "Young Andrew" (48). After Young Andrew successfully prevails upon a lady to let him have his way with her, he continues by getting her to give him her fine clothing. Finally, he threatens to cut her throat; then he sends her home naked. When she arrives at home, shamed with her nakedness, her father discovers her condition and the fact that she has lost all the gold she has taken from him. He says to his daughter,

'Then naked thou came into this world,
And naked thou shalt returne againe.’

(Child 1.434.27)

Though the daughter prevails upon her father, a great earl, to show mercy, the father refuses, making his daughter die of a broken heart. In the meantime, Young Andrew is devoured by a wolf, the great earl’s gold with him. In this ballad where the gaze theme appears.

In “Lord Saltoun and Auchanachie” (239) another naked woman is confronted by gazing men, indicating the pervasiveness of the gaze in the Child collection. A young lady’s parents force her into a marriage with Lord Saltoun when she wished to remain true to her beloved Auchanachie. Forced to be Lord Saltoun’s bride, Miss Jeanie is stripped nude by one of her maidens, as the ballad relates:

Then ane of her maidens they loosed aff her gown,
But bonny Jeanie Gordon she fell in a swoon;
She fell in a swoon low down by their knee;
Says, Look on, I die for my love Auchanachie!

(Child 4.348.12)

Looking to ballads for presentations of women’s bodies, one can see that virginity, at least in the ballad world, was held to be preferable to normal womanhood, which, with very rare exception, led to motherhood. It is significant, in at least two ways, to note that of the eight overtly Christian ballads in the Child collection [“St. Stephen and Herod” (22), “Judas” (23),“The Cherry-Tree Carol” (54), “The Carnal and the Crane,” (55), “Dives and Lazarus” (56), and “Brown Robyn’s Confession” (57), “The Wife of Usher’s Well” (79), and “Sir Hugh, or The Jew’s Daughter” (155)], three are about the
Holy Blessed Virgin. First, it is significant to note that only eight ballads are directly Christian, a fact that shows the ballads to be secular, worldly, of the flesh. Second, pertinent to this chapter, it is significant to note that three of those eight Christian works are about the Virgin Mary.

"The Cherry-Tree Carol" (54) tells that when Mary and Joseph were out walking through an orchard, Mary asked Joseph to pluck for her some cherries, for she was with child. Joseph responds,

'Let him pluck thee a cherry
that brought thee with child.'

To this unkind response came the following reply, which contains a direct reference to Mary's body:

O then bespoke the babe,

within his mother's womb:

'Bow down then the tallest tree
for my mother to have some.'

Then bowed down the highest tree

Unto his mother's hand;

Then she cried, See, Joseph,

I have cherries at command.

(Child 2.2.6-7)

Thus, Joseph is rebuked for questioning the virginal status of Mary, despite the fact of her being with child.
Another Christmas carol in praise of the Virgin is “The Carnal and the Crane” (55). The crane answers the carnal’s questions about the Nativity, including these lines indicating the immaculate state of the Virgin’s body:

‘I pray thee,’ said the Carnal,

‘Tell me before thou go,

Was not the mother of Jesus

Conceived by the Holy Ghost?’

She was the purest virgin,

And the cleanest from sin;

She was the handmaid of our Lord

And mother of our king.

(Child 2.8.4-5).

The virginal body theme, especially the contrast between clean and unclean women’s bodies, is emphasized in another miracle of the Virgin story, “Brown Robyn’s Confession” (57). Brown Robyn, the vilest of sinners, lost in a tempest, finds his soul spared by the intervention of the Mary who explains why he gains heaven:

‘It’s for nae honour ye did to me, Brown Robyn,

It’s for nae guid ye did to mee;

But a’ for your fair confession

You’ve made upon the sea.’

(Child 2.16.9)
Among earthly ballad women, virginity is to be prized and preserved despite a double standard that allows for Highlanders to steal away lowland lasses with impunity and that allows for rape if the man outranks the woman. In “The Bloomfield Hill” (43), a maiden makes moan that if she goes into the broom, her maidenhead will be taken. A witch woman tells her how to trick the man with whom she is supposed to have the tryst. Here is the advice the witch woman gives:

‘For when ye gang to the Broomfield Hill,

   Ye’ll find your love asleep,

   With a silver belt about his head,

   And a broom-cow at his feet.

‘Take you the blossom of the broom.

   The blossom it smells sweet,

   And strew it at your true love’s head,

   And likewise at his feet.

‘Take ye the rings off your fingers,

   Put them on his ring hand,

   To let him know, when he doth awake,

   His love was at his command.’

(Child 1.394.5-7)

The trick works, despite the fact that the lover’s horse tells him he stamped with his foot to waken his master and his hawk tells him, similarly, that he clapped his wings to waken
him. The true love tells his horse and hawk to chase after the maiden, only to hear this response:

‘Ye need no burst your gude white steed

Wi racing oer the howm;

Nae bird flies fastre through the wood,

Than she fled through the broom.’

(Child 1.394.14)

Thus, the clever lass, with the aid of a wiser, older woman is allowed to remain a virgin. Another ballad, however, “Johnie Scot” (99) shows the grimmer side of prizing virginity. A cruel father throws his daughter into prison to starve when he discovers she is pregnant. Luckily, her true love, Johnie Scot, arrives in time to save her. Johnie Scot proves himself to be such an able fighter that her father wishes to bestow both a dowry and his daughter upon him.

The irreversible nature of losing one’s virginity is at issue in “The Maid and the Palmer” (21). The palmer tells the maid that he is aware of the nine children to whom she has given birth. She denies her fornication—and her infanticides. She asks for penance so that she can become a maid again. He replies:

‘Penance I can giue thee none,

But 7 yeere to be a stepping-stone.

‘Other seaven a clapper in a bell,

Other 7 to lead an ape in hell.
‘When thou hast thy penance done,

Then thoust come a mayden home.’

(Child 1.232.13-5)

For one ballad maiden, keeping her maidenhead becomes the desired reward for the self-sacrifice of her sister. In “Fair Annie” (62) the father of Annie’s seven sons tells her that he goes across the sea to bring back a bride. Like Patient Griselda, Fair Annie agrees to bake the wedding bread, brew the wedding ale, and made all the preparations. When the new lady comes home, she says,

‘Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,

Running on the castle wa,

And I were a grey cat myssel,

I soon would woory them a’.

‘Gin my seven sons were seven young hares,

Running oer yon lilly lee,

And I were a grew hound myssel,

Soon worried they a’ should be.’

(Child 2.70.23-4)

Just as Fair Annie is lamenting this way, the new lady comes and asks what is the matter. She discovers that they are sisters and bestows upon Fair Annie three of the seven ships she has, while giving four to Annie’s eldest sons. Then she concludes her declaration of relief about discovering how things are in what was to be her new home this way:

But thanks to a’ the powers in heaven
That I gae maiden hame!"

(Child 2.70.31)

Eppie Morrie in “Eppie Morrie” (223) successfully fights to preserve the sanctity of her body, her virginity, as she wrestles her would-be rapist. When Eppie is laid in the bed of her abductor, she vows to try her strength against his to preserve her maidenhead. After having wrestled all night, apparently, Eppie says this to the maid who comes to wake her:

‘Get up, get up, young woman,

And drink the wine wi me;’

‘You might have called me maiden,

I’m sure as leal as thee.’

(Child 4.240.13)

For the intimacy implicit in the many ballad pregnancies, it seems odd that ballad women characters forbid men from being present at childbirth. In “Willie and Earl Richard’s Daughter” (102), the lady sends her lover hunting, refusing to let him serve as midwife to a baby who turns out later to be Robinhood. In “Leesome Brand” (15) the lady refuses her lover to serve as midwife and dies in labor as an apparent consequence. “Rose the Red and White Lily” 103 continues the pattern of the lady’s refusing a man’s help with the delivery. “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice” (40) is about the necessity of having a suitable (mortal) midwife. Kittredge comments that “it is well known that elves and water spirits have frequently solicited the help of mortal women at lying-in time” (69).
That women's bodies were, and perhaps still are, except in the clinical sense, a mystery to men is a recurrent theme in the ballads. Men in the ballads had a certain respect for women, respect founded on fear and superstition. Childbirth, for instance, was a mystery to medieval men. A ballad woman character's refusing the help of a ballad man character might have been based on lack of trust at a time when she knew she could rely only on women. Men were not permitted near their wives during childbirth, and after the child had been born, the father was kept separate from his wife. Genevieve d'Harcourt explains: The young mother, from the time of the birth of her child until she was completely recovered, that is to say, for two or three weeks, spent most of her time receiving visits from her friends. In all the Child ballads where the fathers volunteer to act as midwives, the mothers refuse, even at their own peril.

Interest in women's bodies is prominent in ballads that centered on motherhood, on the bodily fact of having given birth, often with the mothers' having special powers. In four ballads in which mothers issue curses, parallels appear in the curse motif. In the first three, "Fair Mary of Wallington," "The Mother's Malison," and "Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow," a mother is the agent of the curse on her child, but the children may avoid the curse by refusing to marry. (In some versions the mother delivers a blessing.) In "Burd Isabel and Earl Patrick," the mother indirectly curses her son by advising him to break his vow to marry Burd Isabel. Strangely, the mothers do not seem malicious in their curses. In fact, Fair Mary's mother seems an unwilling agent of the curse on her daughters. In both "The Mother's Malison" and "Fair Willie" the mothers issue their curses more as warning than as malignant death wishes. The curses say, in effect, "If you go to that particular girl at this particular time, you will die." The mothers
do not wish to see their children die, but they have no choice but to relate the inevitable consequences of the marriages. The children seem to understand their mothers’ position and therefore do not blame the mothers. In “Mary of Wallington,” Mary seeks her mother’s aid and comfort; in “Rare Willie,” Willie rides back to get his mother’s blessing; in “Burd Isabel and Earl Patrick,” Earl Patrick seeks his mother’s advice, and in “The Mother’s Malison” Willie seeks the aid of two mothers, both his own and Margaret’s.

If the mothers have no malice toward their children but merely warn them of the consequences of their deeds, why, then, are they the agents of the curse of death? To answer the question of the peculiar power of mothers to utter curses, one must consider two themes common to all four ballads—birth and death. Birth was viewed by non-scientific man (the ballad world and the ballad audience) as a rather mysterious happening. Mothers—through their bodies—were viewed as having a seemingly magical power, the power to give birth, that men did not possess. If mothers had an exclusive, special relationship with birth, they might also have a peculiar relationship with the other end, death. Thus, motherhood, may be viewed as a sort of paradox: when a mother gives birth to her child, she not only gives him life but at the same time mortality, so that in bringing life into the world she thereby condemns that life to the inevitable end of all mortal beings, death. Eve of the Genesis story is thus both given of physical life and agent of the curse of mortal death. The Yin of Taoism’s Yin and Yang further illustrates the archetype of this paradoxical view of motherhood. When the children of the ballads ask their mothers to help them overcome the apparent curse, all the mothers can tell them is that they should not marry, meaning that they should not grow up, grow older, if they
wish to avoid death. The mothers wish to keep their children always as children to avoid
the curse of death. In fact, in both “Burd Isabell and Earl Patrick” and “Rare Willie
Drowned in Yarrow,” the mothers mention the young ages of their children. And in the
other ballads, the mothers imply the youth of their children.

For mortal children to avoid growing up is, of course, impossible. Just as the
children must mature and marry, they must also grow old and die. Lifespans being
relatively short during the Middle Ages, this death could come shortly after marriage, not
necessarily as a result of the mother’s desire to curse her child. LaMonte explains:
Noble girls were married off at the age of twelve or fourteen, and sometimes even
younger. From then on they continued to marry, the mortality among men being much
higher than among women (385).

The view of women as mothers, the agents of bodily life and its inevitable end,
bodily death, has religious implications. First, the idea that a mother has special
supernatural powers may have influenced the rise of the cult of Mariolatry. If an ordinary
earth mother had special powers, then how much more powerful must be the Mother of
God? As Hoyt explains: “In the twelfth century the Virgin remained the Queen of
Heaven, but a transformation took place in her cult. *Collections of Miracles of the Virgin*
spread the new devotion; these tales constituted a new popular literature in which the
Mother’s intercession with her divine Child reflects the elements of tenderness,
compassion, and love that characterize the piety of the high Middle Ages” (364).

In addition to showing the power of motherhood in issuing curses, “Fair Mary of
Wallington” (91), illustrates that childbirth was a mystery to ballad men. Fair Mary faces
a family curse, or hereditary medical condition, if not a true curse, that says all daughters
in her family must not marry, for they will die in childbirth. As the ballad opens, five of her sisters have already succumbed to the curse. Mary therefore vows never to marry. She eventually capitulates by marrying the insistent Knight of Wallington. Before “three quarters and a day” (Child 2.311.7), she is in labor. Mary sends a messenger to bring her mother to tell her remaining sister to “keep her maidenhead, . . . For if eer she came in man’s bed/the same gate woud she gang” (Child 2.311-12.21). When the mother arrives, she asks Mary’s husband where Mary is. The narrative gives the bewildered Knight of Wallington’s reply:

    He turnd his head round about,

    The tears did fill he ee:

    Tis a month,’ he said,’since she

    Took her chambers from me.’ (Child 2.312.27)

The ballad ends with Fair Mary’s mother taking the baby by means of Caesarian section, thereby sacrificing Fair Mary, Mary’s mother presiding as typical midwife.

Fair Mary of Wallington’s body is under an inexplicable family curse. The mother in “Fair Mary of Wallington” serves not only as midwife but also as a seer in that she warns Fair Mary of the curse. When Mary’s messenger tells her mother that Mary is in labor, the mother demonstrates her consternation over her daughter’s fate by kicking over a table and throwing a silver plate into the fire. When the mother arrives at her daughter’s deathbed, surprisingly, Fair Mary asks that the rings be taken off her fingers and given to her “. . . mother dear,/for she was all the wite” (Child 2.312.30). Thus the “mother dear” appears as the unwilling agent of the curse on her daughters.
In some ballads, however, mothers actually cast curses on their children. In the “Mother’s Malison” (216A), a mother curses her son by telling him that if he goes to marry Margaret, he will drown in Clyde’s Water. The young man defies his mother’s warnings, swims the dangerous Clyde’s Waters, and arrives at Margaret’s house after everyone is asleep. He asks Margaret to open the door to let him in. She refuses, explaining that she must not disturb her mother’s sleep. She further discourages her suitor by explaining that the three barns are full of corn, hay, and “merry young men,” respectively. When the would-be bridegroom on his way home attempts to swim Clyde’s Waters, he drowns. Thus, two mothers are the agent of the curse in this ballad—the young man’s mother who said, “My malison drown thee” (IV.188.4) and Margaret’s mother, whose sleep would not be disturbed.

Again the cursed status of a young woman’s body appears in the narrative of “Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow” (215 E), a ballad similar to that of “The Mother’s Malison” (216 B). The ballad begins with a dialogue between Meg, who wants to marry Willie, and Willie’s mother. His mother promises Meg her choice of her other fine sons if Meg will forsake Willie, the clerk. Meg, however, responds that she must have Willie. The narrative leaps at this point. Next Willie and his brothers are traveling to the wedding of Meg and Willie. Suddenly, Willie remembers that he has not received his mother’s blessings on his marriage, so he returns to his mother. Instead of her blessing, Willie’s mother delivers this curse:

‘Your Peggy she’s but bare fifteen
And ye are scarcely twenty;
The water o Gamery is wide and braid;
My heavy curse gang wi the! (Child 4.181.9)

The brothers arrive at the church to celebrate the wedding. Later, Willie’s riderless horse arrives. When Meg learns that Willie has drowned in Garmery, she joins her Willie by drowning herself there.

Following the pattern of a mother’s cursing her child is “Burd Isabel and Earl Patrick” (257 A), in which the mother also warns her son not to marry a particular girl. This narrative differs, however, from “Rare Wille Drowned in Yarrow” in that, although Earl Patrick’s mother warns him not to marry Burd Isabel, Earl Patrick himself invokes the curse. When Burd Bell is only fifteen, she goes into the service of Earl Patrick. By the time she is sixteen, she is pregnant with his child. Earl Patrick promises to marry her if the child is a son, but when the son is born, Patrick, having sought the advice of his mother not to marry Burd Bell, sets Burd Bell up in a fine house, giving the excuse that he cannot marry her until his parents have died. Burd Bell asks Patrick to make good his promise to marry her. He replies, implying her ingratitude by reminding her what a fine home he has given her. He concludes with this curse on himself:

‘If eer I marry anither woman,

Or bring anither hame,

I wish a hundred evils may enter me,

And may I fa oure the brim!’ (Child 4.419.16)

Soon after he has made this oath, Earl Patrick marries a duke’s daughter with a rich dowry. After the marriage, Earl Patrick’s aunt goes to Burd Bell, seeking to bring back Burd Bell’s young son for the new bride to see. After Bell emphatically refuses, Earl Patrick goes to her, requesting to show their son to his new bride. After Burd Bell
reminds Patrick of his self-avowed curse, the ballad ends:

He’s turnd him richt and round about,

His horse head to the wind,

The hundred evils enterd him,

And he fell our the brim. (Child 4.419.26) (Lutz 27-32).

Bodily motherhood, in its simplest sense of having given birth, is shown to be far from a simple issue in still other ballads. The interest in a lady’s body is evident in perhaps the most misogynistic text of all 305 Child ballads, “The Earl of Errol” (231), in which the lady does not become pregnant and therefore sues for divorce. A court is convened at Perth to consider the case. The lady, wife of Earl Errol, claims after a night with the earl she is “as leal a maid yet/As yestreen when I lay down.” She goes on to explain that she is not pregnant:

‘What need I wash my apron

And hing it on the door?

It’s baith side and wide enough

Hangs even down before.’

(Child 4.283.12)

The story then continues that Earl Errol has gone to Edinbro to bring home Peggy, whom he has promised ten hundred pounds to bear him a son. The ballad continues,

He’s keepit his Peggy in his room

Three quarter of a year,

And just at the nine months’ end

She’s a son to him did bear.
Having "proved" his wife to be infertile, Earl Errol demands her dowry.

To the wedded wife's father the court says this:

'Now hold your tongue, ye whorish bitch,
Sae loud as I hear ye lie!

For yonder sits Lord Errol's son,
Upon his motheer's knee;
For yonder sits Lord Errol's son,
Altho he's no by thee.'

The court rules finally that the lady lost her right to regain her dowry the first night she bedded with her husband, showing that the value of a woman is dependent upon her body and what does or does not happen to it.

In "Earl Errol," one finds a woman who is blamed for not becoming pregnant; in the "Cruel Mother" (20 A) blame for becoming pregnant goes solely to the mother, not the father, and, driven with the full guilt of her motherhood, she resorts to desperate means. She "leans her back to a thorn" to deliver her baby alone. Then, after digging a grave and burying the child, she returns to her father's house to be "counted the leelest maid o them a'." The ballad ends tragically with her seeing her baby and saying to it,

'O look not sae sweet, my bonie babe,
Gin ye smyle sae, ye'll smyle me-dead.'

(Child 1.220.4)
From all the ballads treating the topic of motherhood so far, we can see that pregnancy was to be entered into warily, if at all. Certainly, the Child collection indicates that adultery may be blamed on the mother and wife. In “Hughie Grame” (191) one sees that the eponymous protagonist, who is to be executed, places the blame on his wife, as he gives this condemnation:

‘Pray have me remembered to Peggy, my wife;

As she and I walkt over the moor,

She was the cause of [the loss of] my life,

And with the old bishop she plaid the whore.

(Child 4.11.22)

Interest in the adulterous female body appears in a more light-hearted ballad, “The Gypsy Laddie” (200), though the blame still rests with the woman who gives up her lord’s castle to travel with the gypsies, where she causes the death of fifteen good men. (Though in some versions the lady repents.) By contrast, the ballad “Jamie Douglas” (204) tells a complicated story of adultery, focusing on the desire of the lady involved to give up her motherly body. In the first-person narrative the lady says that she was happy when her auld son was born and set upon his nurses knee, but things were different when her young son arrived. The ballad states:

But oh, an my young son was born

And set upon the nurse’s knee

And I mysel war dead and gane,

For a maid again I’ll never be!

(Child 4.94.5)
Word has gone out to the lord of the household that his wife has been unfaithful with Jamie Lockhart. She has not been, but a visitor sets her up to look guilty by putting Lockhart's shoes under her bed. Her lord therefore forsakes her and puts her out of his home, leaving her by saying,

'O fare thee well, my once lovely maid!

O fare thee well, once dear to me!

O fare thee well, my once lovely maid!

For wi me again ye sall never be.'

(Child 4.94.10)

The ballad ends with the lady's going home to her father, leaving her sons with their father.

Child's interest in collecting ballads about the female body is further exemplified in "James Harris (The Daemon Lover)" (243), which shows adultery to be arch evil, even in a tragic situation. James Harris vows his love for a maid; she returns his vow. Then he is forced to go to sea. Eventually, word comes that he has been lost at sea. His beloved marries a simple carpenter and mothers his children. One night, however, James Harris comes to his beloved's window and tempts her away, saying,

'I will forgive the[e] what is past,

If thou wilt with me go.'

(Child 4.363.23)

The woman agrees to go but eventually discovers that she has been taken away by the daemon lover for forsaking her husband and family. She is never heard of again, while her husband the carpenter goes mad.
Earthly consequences of existing within the female body are seldom happy in the Child collection. Consequences of infidelity—or simply of motherhood—are considerable, in the Child collection, especially among monarchs. In all the political ballads, emphasis is placed upon the lady’s position as mother, despite what else she may do. In “Fause Foodrage” (89), nobles rebel, killing the king but sparing the queen’s life. The queen is under guard, awaiting the arrival of her baby. The night she is to deliver, she gets drunk the four and twenty valiant knights who are guarding her, escapes, and goes to the swine’s sty to have her child. Wise William’s wife soon finds her. The queen explains her situation, telling the other that her son is to be executed but that had she given birth to a daughter, the child would have been spared. Wise William’s wife exchanges babies, giving over her daughter for the queen’s son. When that son is old enough to learn his parentage, he vows to regain his lands and set the account straight.

The Child collection points out the tragedy of a historically factual body, that of Jane Seymour. About “The Death of Queen Jane” (170) Kittredge writes this explanatory note: “Jane Seymour gave birth to Prince Edward October 12, 1537, and by a natural process, but, in consequence of imprudent management, died twelve days after. There was a belief that severe surgery had been required, under which the queen sank” (Kittredge 418). In the ballad telling of the event, one finds this exchange between King Henry and his queen, indicating a willingness among the public—folk who might be called “Royal Watchers” today—to attempt to make understandable and personal the truth of events they believed to have been kept from them:

‘O royal King Henry, do one thing for me;
Rip open my two sides, and save my baby!’
‘O royal Queen Jane, that thing will not do;
If I lose your fair body, I’ll lose your baby too.’

(Child 3.373.2)

Queen Jane continues in labor until she falls into a swoon. Then, says the ballad:

They opend her two sides, and the baby was found.

The baby was christened with joy and much mirth,

Whilst poor Queen Jane’s body lay cold under earth:

(Child 3.373.4)

Made famous by Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own,” “Mary Hamilton” presents a story of a woman’s body defiled by one too mighty to be called into account (173). Kittredge’s note explains that the ballad gives account of one of the four Marias who went with Mary Stuart into France. Mary Hamilton has been “courted” by the greatest Stuart of them all but is in the impossible situation of mothering his child. She drowns the baby and is then executed for her deed, despite the sympathy she has won from other ladies, as the ballad relates:

When she cam down the Cannongate,

The Cannongate sae free,

Many a ladie lookd oer her window

Weeping for this ladie.

(Child 3.384.10)

She tells them, however, not to mourn for her because she is guilty of killing her baby. She goes on to say, in the end, the famous lines, indicating her story could be that of
others who happened to be so unlucky as to bear a child:

‘Last nicht there was four Maries,

The nicht there’s be but three;

There was Marie Seton, and Marie Beton,

And Marie Carmichael and me.

(Child 3.385.18)

Though there is no one to rescue Mary Hamilton, in “The Laird o’ Logie (182) the pregnant lady rescues her lover from being held in prison for execution by the king, as the Child collection presents another lady who is defined by the condition of her body, another one whose interest for the reader is at least as much due to her condition as to her actions in the plot. First she begs for his life; then she bribes Carmichael to help free Laird Logie. Finally, she sees to it that her lord has weapons to fight his way out. When the escape proves successful, the ballad tells the ending this way, illustrating the double standard is in place here, too:

May Margaret’s turnd her round about,

A wot a loud laugh laughed she:

‘The egg is chipd, the bird is flown,

Ye’ll see nae mair of Young Logie.’

The tane is shippd at the pier of Leith,

The other at the Queen’s Ferrie,

And she’s gotten a father to her bairn,

The wanton laird of Young Logie.
Similarly, in the quite popular (popular in the more modern sense) political
"Geordie" (209) the lady’s becoming a mother is at issue, her body being her self. The
king has imprisoned Geordie, who had been captured in a battle “in the north.” When
Geordie’s lady receives the letter telling of his plight, she vows to ride her good grey
steed without eating or drinking until she can rescue her Geordie. She buys his freedom.
The final lines of the ballad tell Geordie’s gratitude to the mother of his seven children:

He claspit her by the middle sma,

And he kist her lips sae rosy:

‘The fairest flower o woman-kind

Is my sweet, bonie lady!’

(Child 4.127.15)

In the Child ballads where revenge is evident, the double standard remains
evident, in that pregnancy is always the fault of the woman, again indicating that within
the collection the women are defined by their bodies. A daughter’s pregnancy is
discovered by her father the king in “Willie O Winsbury” (100). The king sets out to
capture and hang Willie, but declines to do so because Willie is so beautiful. The ballad
offers these lines:

But when he cam the king before,

He was clad o the red silk;

His hair was like to threeds of gold,

And his skin was as white as milk.
‘It is nae wonder,’ said the king.

‘That my daughter’s love ye did win;

Had I been a woman, as I am a man,

My bedfellow ye should hae been.

(Child 2.399-400.9-10)

The revenge theme appears also in “Jellon Grame” (90). When Jellon Grame discovers that Lillie Flower is pregnant, he says this:

‘O shoud I spare your life,’ he says,

‘Until that bairn be born,

I ken fu well your stern father

Would hang me on the morn.’

(Child 2.304.11)

Lillie Flower prevails upon him, saying that she will keep her baby in the “good green wood, where she will beg for her bread.” The ballad continues.

He took nae pity on that ladie,

Tho she for life did pray;

But pierced her thro the fair body,

As at his feet she lay.

(Child 2.304.13)

Revenge, however, is exacted when the baby, who has grown up in the woods, kills Jellon Grame with his bow and arrow and places his murdering father away from the grave where his mother is buried because the father is not good enough to be near her.
Still more troubling than those that deal with revenge are the ballads that deal with the taboo subject, incest, because the women’s bodies are violated by those who, according to moral tradition, must defend the purity of those very bodies. Child includes at least six where incest is at issue. [Lizzie Wan” (51) is treated elsewhere.]

First in the collection is “Babylon; or, The Bonnie Banks O Fordie” (14 A). A banished man approaches three sisters who have gone out to pick flowers. He says to the first sister,

‘It’s whether will ye be a rank robber’s wife,
Or will ye die by my wee pen-knife?’

(Child 1.173.4)

The “rank robber” kills the first two sisters who refuse his suit, choosing death over dishonor. The youngest sister says he will not be able to kill her because she will be protected by her brother who lives in the wood; his name is Baby Lon. When the robber realizes that he has murdered his sisters and proposed an incestuous relationship with all three, he takes his own life.

“Sheath and Knife” (16) is another ballad in the collection which tells the story of incest in which a brother defiles the forbidden body of his sister. The story unfolds, as is typical with ballads, without moralizing, the sympathy lying, if there is sympathy at all, with the ballad characters. Willie takes his sister and the baby she has borne him down to their father’s deer park where he shoots them with his bow and arrow and buries them. When he comes home, sorrowing, the ballad offers these lines to explain:

‘O Willie, O Willie, what makes thee in pain?’

‘I have lost a sheath and knife that I’ll never see again.’
'There is ships o your father's sailing on the sea
That will bring as good a sheath and a knife unto thee.'

'There is ships o my father's sailing on the sea,
But sic a sheath and a knife they can never bring to me.'

(Child 1.186.7-8)

Though the incest in "Sheath and Knife" appears to be between a brother and sister who are aware of the fact of their parentage, "The Bonny Hind" (50), treated here earlier, is perhaps more tragic because the two learn their identity only after they have been lovers. When the sister discovers that she has made love to her brother, she takes out her pen-knife and stabs herself in the heart. The brother takes her body to bury in "the bonny green." When the father asks why his son is sorrowing the son says he sings for his "bonny hind/Beneath yon hollin tree!" The father replies with these poignant lines:

'O were ye at your sister's bower,

Your sister fair to see,

Ye'll think na mair o you bonny hyn

Beneath the hollin tree.'

(Child 1.447.17)

In this ballad, and also in "Leesome Brand" (15), where in some versions the hind appears to be the beloved herself, magically transformed, one may wish to turn to Christina Bacchilega's work, "The Fruit of the Womb: Creative Uses of Naturalizing
Tradition in Folktales.” Bacchilega explains that in folklore it is common for women to go through a “naturalizing” process where they are said to be like or, in supernatural tales, actually to become, a part of nature (153-163).

Women’s bodies have been violated in “Brown Robyn” (57) inasmuch as the ballad involves incest. It is, however, a Miracle of the Virgin, not a domestic tragedy and therefore has its interest on the bodies of the defiled women and the redemptive powers of the One who has always been a virgin. Brown Robyn, seeing that he is about to die at sea from a tempest, prays, confessing to horrible sins, including incest with his mother and sisters. His soul is saved through the intervention of the Virgin Mary.

“Lady Isabel” (261) focuses on the status of a daughter’s body, with the body indicating the daughter’s character. The step-mother accuses Lady Isabel of incest, calling her her “father’s whore.” Lady Isabel denies the accusation, saying that the fine clothes her father buys for her are nothing compared to what she receives from her love across the sea. Finally, the stepmother appeals to Lady Isabel’s sense of courtesy and gets Isabel to drink with her a toast of peace. The stepmother only looks as if she drinks; Lady Isabel drinks the poisoned drink and dies. From this ballad, one included late in the collection and not having the bare, tragic nature of those from the first two volumes, one can see that incest was an issue cropping up in folk communication even in more recent ballads.

Rape appears even more frequently, especially in the ballads where a highlander steals away a lowland lady to become his bride, as in “Rob Roy” (225) and others. A typical (apparent) happy ending to a ballad in which rape occurs appears in “Prince
Heathen” (104) where the rapist chooses to marry the woman victim because she has given birth to a son. The ballad ends with this declaration:

‘I’ll wash my young son with the milk.
I will dry my young son with the silk;
For hearts will break, and hands will bow;
So dear will I love my lady now!’

(Child 2.425.8)

The lady, however, gives no indication of being reconciled and therefore underscores the theme that what happens to a woman’s body is not always in her control.

Not all rape ballads end with apparent “happy” marriages. In “The Bonnie House of Airlie” (199), rape is the sort of act of violence it is said to be in modern warfare. The Lady of the House of Airly is raped because she refuses to give up her allegiance to Bonny Prince Charlie.

Perhaps because becoming pregnant changes the body in more visible ways than does being raped, the domestic tragedies centering around pregnancy are more arresting than ballads telling of rape. In “Fair Janet” (64), Janet loves Willie and has his baby, but she is betrothed to a French lord. At the wedding to the French lord, Janet and Willie dance together. The ballad goes on:

She had nae turned her throw the dance,
Throw the dance by thrice,
Whan she fell down at Willie’s feet,
And up did never rise.

(Child 2.104.28)
Willie sends word to his mother that his horse has slain him and to be kind to his young son, her grandson, for father he has none. The ballad concludes with the birk and brier formulaic ending:

The tane was buried in Marie’s kirk,
And the tither in Marie’s quire;
Out of the tane there grew a birk,
And the tither a bonny brier.

(Child 2.104.30)

Another domestic tragedy is “Lady Maisry” (65). When Lady Maisry’s brother discovers that she is pregnant, he curses her for consorting with that “English dog,” Lord William. Lord William arrives too late to save Lady Maisry and her baby from the execution by fire her brother has arranged. Lord William vows as follows:

O I’ll gar burn for you, Maisry,
Your father an your mother;
An I’ll gar burn for you, Maisry,
Your sister an your brother.

‘An I’ll gar burn for you, Maisry,
The chief of all your kin;
An the last bonfire that I come to,
Mysel I will cast in.

(Child 2.115.30)
In “Lord Ingram and Chiel Wyet” (66), Lord Ingram and Chiel Wyet, two brothers, vie for the love of Lady Maisery. Lord Ingram woos her family while Chiel Wyet woos her “amang the sheets so sma.” Lady Maisery has the baby but must go through with the wedding that has been arranged. As the baby is being revealed to Lord Ingram, the two brothers confront each other and kill each other. Lady Maisery goes mad and declares that she will go begging, as the ballad ends this way:

‘For a bit I’ll beg for Chiel Wyet,

For Lord Ingram I’ll beg three;

All for the good and honorable marriage

At Mary Kirk [he] gave me.’

(Child 2.130.31)

A domestic conflict with a happy ending is quite rare among the ballads in the Child collection “Willie ‘O Douglas Dale” (101) presents one such happy ending. Willy goes to the English court “to serve for meat and fee.” Soon Dame Oliphant tells Willy about what has transpired between them,

‘O narrow, narrow’s my gown, Willy,

That wont to be sae wide;

An short, short is my coats, Willy,

That wont to be sae side;

An gane is a’ my fair color,

An low laid is my pride.

(Child 2.407.9)
She goes on to explain that if her father finds out he will not drink again, and if her mother finds out she will “go brain.” She has Willy make her a bower in the green wood and sends him out hunting while she delivers the baby. Thereafter they reveal their identities. She is the king’s daughter, and he turns out to be the earl of Douglas, from which point they set out on a fair ship for Scotland. From this ballad one can see that social class, at least in the ballad world, overcomes any qualms about pre-marital relations.

Another ballad where a deflowering of a virgin ends “happily” is “Thomas O Yonderdale” (253). Thomas O Yonderdale courts Lady Maisry until he steals her “virgin rose,” after which he no longer comes to see her. Thomas travels to an “unco land” where he courts and becomes engaged to another. At the wedding, Lady Maisry appears looking like a queen. The plot twists to reveal that Thomas has sent for Lady Maisry to become his wife, though she has not been aware of the fact. Thomas tells her,

‘Ye hae come on hired horseback,

But ye’se gae hame in coach sae free;

For here’s the flower into my bower

I mean my wedded wife shall be.’

(Child 4.410.29)

Oddly, the ballads that unite the mothers and fathers happily are few. Perhaps Child did not care for them much and included few therefore, or, perhaps, more likely, among the possible ballads extant, only a few have happy endings.

If the ballads about pregnancy cause one to question just what the interests of the ballad singers, audience and collector are, the nine ballads showing mutilation of women characters’ bodies add much to that inquiry in that the mutilated bodies are marked as
unfit bodies for proper women. As with the violent ballads treated earlier, ballads in
which women are mutilated allow the reader to view the gruesome scenes from a distance
within the safe confines of Child’s scholarly text. The proper readers are allowed to view
that which is not proper, inscribed on the women mutilation victims. Then, too, the
proper collector, saying that he wishes to collect all the ballads, allows himself to have
dominion over the violence, imposing the ordering principle to stories of disorder. The
first such ballad containing mutilation is “Gil Brenton” (5). A lady has come to be a
bride for Gil Brenton. She asks what the custom there is only to be told that seven brides
have come before her to be tested. The ballad explains:

‘Seven king’s daughters has our king wedded,
An seven king’s daughters has our king bedded.

‘But he’s cutted the paps fæ their breast-bane,
An sent them mourning hame again.

(Child 1.68.17-8)

It turns out that the enchanted bed, (‘O speak to me blankets and speak to me sheets’) can
tell whether the bride in bed is a maid or not. The eighth lady tricks Gil Brenton and his
mother, thereby avoiding the mutilation, after she sent her maid into the wedding
chamber instead of going herself. The ballad ends happily, however. Though the lady is
pregnant, it turns out that the father of the child is Gil Brenton, who had visited her in her
homeland and given her tokens. The ballad ends this way:

Now or a month was come and gone,
This lady bare a bonny young son.
An it was well written on his breastbane

‘Gil Brenton is my father’s name.’

(Child 1.70.73-4)

Happy ending or no, though, the mutilation motif gives the reader pause.

Beheadings of women appear in two ballads in which the reader is allowed to view violent mutilation “safely” through the agency of Child. The next ballad in the Child collection to contain the mutilation motif is “Sir Lionel” (18 C), in which Sir Lionel splits a wild woman’s head in twain. Similarly, “Lizzie Wan” (51) involves a beheading. Lizzie Wan makes moan because she is pregnant by her brother. When she tells her brother, he responds by beheading her and cutting her body in three, as the ballad states:

And he has cutted aff Lizzie Wan’s head,

And her fair body in three,

And he’s awa to his mothers bower

And sair aghast was he.

(Child 1.448.6)

When his mother sees the blood, she asks for an explanation, to which the brother says,

‘Some fallow’s deed I have done, mother,

And I pray you pardon me;

For I’ve cutted aff my greyhound’s head;

He wadna rin for me.’

(Child 1.448.8)
Thus, the mutilated sister is further dehumanized by the brother who refers to her as his greyhound.

Eventually, Geordy Wan tells the truth about his crime against his sister and bids farewell to his mother, telling her, with apparent remorse, ""The sun and the moon shall dance on the green/That night when I come home"" (Child 1.448.12).

"Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73 D) also involves a beheading, this time of a bride at her own wedding, the mutilation perhaps shocking the reader with the incongruity of a groom’s sundering his bride’s head from her body at the wedding. Lord Thomas loves Faire Ellinor, as the name is given in version D, but he is betrothed to the brown girl, who is rich. Faire Ellinor comes to the wedding, where she questions Lord Thomas’ decision. He responds this way:

‘Despise her not, Fair Ellin, he sayd,

‘Despise her not now unto mee;

For better I love thy little finger

Than all her whole body.’

(Child 2.187.14)

At this declaration, the brown girl takes out her penknife and stabs Faire Elinor through the ribs to the heart. When Lord Thomas sees his love’s heart’s blood, he takes out his sword and beheads his bride. Then he kills himself by falling on his own sword.

It seems that the mutilated women who are permitted to live are both made grotesque and rendered less than complete women in the eyes of the men who have power over them. "Old Robin of Portingale" (80), treated already in this work, is another ballad with the mutilation motif more similar to that found in Gil Brenton. The jealous
husband mutilates his unfaithful wife, cutting off her paps and her ears, thereby allowing her to live in a form diminished. Much has been written in our own time, in fact, about how women who have had mastectomies feel less than women because of what has happened to their bodies. In “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard” (81), also treated earlier in this work, the jealous husband cuts off his wife’s paps. When a woman attacks a woman, as in “Lord Thomas and Fair Annet” (73 D), she is acting to eliminate her competition in an act of sororophobia, not to bring someone into submission.

In the “Twa Knights” (268), mutilation is made socially acceptable as long as everyone agrees to marriages as prescribed by the social code. In the ballad two brothers, one who is an established knight and one who is a “young hynde squire” are talking about women. The knight gives this advice:

Lay never your love on lemanry,

Bring nae gude woman to shame.’

(Child 5.25.4)

The young squire responded that there was no such thing as a good woman. Then the two brothers agree to test the knight’s lady. When the squire comes to her, having received advice from his foster mother, the wife is ready for him. The knight’s wife sends in her niece to the tryst, where the niece has agreed to lose her finger as token of the apparent infidelity in exchange for a handsome dowry. The ballad relates:

When he had got his will o her,

His will as he lang sought

Her ring but and her ring-finger

Away frae her he brought.
When the wife is called out for her apparent adultery, she can produce her finger intact. Then the niece is given the option of using a brand against the young squire or using a ring to wed him. Instead of choosing to mutilate her assailant, she chooses to wed the squire, who has defiled and mutilated her, a decision that the ballad characters comment upon this way:

Thrice she minted to the brand,
But she took up the ring;
And a' the ladies who heard o it
Said she was a wise woman.

“Child Owlet” (291) offers a twist on the mutilation motif in that a woman pretends to be mutilated though she has not been, thereby emphasizing the frequency with which mutilation occurs the Child collection. A wife wishes to have Child Owlet as her lover. When she is unsuccessful in tempting him to cuckold her husband, Lord Ronald, she takes out her penknife and cuts herself “below her green stay’s cord.” making her body bleed. For the appearance of mutilation, Lord Ronald orders Child Owlet to be executed by drawing and quartering. The ballad ends graphically, with drawing and quartering:

There was not a kow in Darling muir,
Nor ae piece o a rind,
But drappit of Childe Owlet’s blude
And pieces o his skin.
There was not a kow in Darling muir.
Nor ae piece o a rash.

But drappit o Child Owlet’s blude
And pieces o his flesh.

(Child 5.157.11-2)

From this last ballad with the mutilation motif one might begin to see a pattern among all the mutilation ballads about what a proper woman was supposed be: chaste and self-sacrificing. A woman who met the criteria would have her proper body restored to her. “The Queen of Scotland” (301), differs from the others in that mutilation occurs but is miraculously healed, perhaps indicating that the woman is still of worth, despite her disfigurement. The Queen of Scotland tries to seduce Troy Muir, who declines. The queen secretly vows then to do him some harm. She asks him to move a stone in the garden, telling him under the stone there is a pit “And in it there’s as much red gowd/As buy a dukedom to thee.” When he lifts the stone a great snake wraps itself around his waist, ready to bite. A young maid then comes by. The snake then cuts “aff her white paps.” For saving him, Troy Muir marries the maid on that day and has a son by her exactly nine months later. The ballad ends happily:

As heaven was pleased, in short time,
To ease her first sad pain,
Sae was it pleasd, when she’d a son,
To hae a pap again.

(Child 5.177.18)
CHAPTER THREE

THE CHILD BALLADS VIEWED AS "BODYTALK"

In Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature Jane Burns offers a theory of body/bawdy talk that may be applied to selected ballads. Drawing from the theories of Luce Irigaray and Teresa de Lauretis, Burns states that the heroines she analyzes have been denied subjectivity “in the specular logic of Western philosophical thought that constructs man as homo loquens and woman as the objectified ‘other’ of his discourse” (2). In other words, women have no voice; they are merely objects to be looked upon and therefore cannot speak for themselves. Burns goes on to explain the following about her practice:

[she] attempts to hear, within the dominant discourse that construct female nature in the French Middle Ages—the religiously-conditioned discourse of paraliturgical theater and the patristic commentaries that inform it, the idealizing discourse of courtly romancers in the twelfth century, and the more overtly misogynous discourse employed by writers of fabliau and farce in the fifteenth centuries—other voices that speak against and dissent from the dominant tradition.

Burns explains that she calls the resistant doubled discourse “bodytalk,” the language of the otherwise speechless heroine. She goes on to explain that “bodytalk” is not something the authors have their characters do; it is something that feminist critics set
out to hear. Burns concludes, "I am thus not making a case for inherent "female subjectivity" . . . I want to record how medieval heroines can speak both within and against the social and theoretical conventions that construct them" (7).

Following Burns' lead I wish to read selected ballads, listening for bodytalk, listening for the resistant voices of female characters in the Lacanian father's text. I propose to show that ballad women do not always submit to the social mores dominant within their ballads. Moreover, the women characters who have been defined by their bodies as mothers, virgins, or mutilated beings can "use" the condition of their bodies to speak.

From F. J. Child's writings it is difficult to say who he thought composed the ballads, inasmuch as he died before he could write the essay that would have been he definitive word to accompany his collection. James Reppert reports:

Among the Child MSS preserved in Harvard College Library there is a piece of yellow notepaper with a single paragraph at the top and several abbreviated notes, mostly references to books, at the bottom. This little scrap Child scribbled out in August 1896 in an effort to begin at last his long-awaited essay on ballad literature. He died almost in the very act of writing it. (197).

Reppert goes on to attempt to construct what might have been in Child's essay, a job only Hart in 1906 had tackled before Reppert. There simply are no records to answer some of the questions one would have liked to have asked Child.

As to the authorship of the ballads, one source suggests they were composed by women. The *Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* states:
Although these [ballads] share motifs with the lais of which the leading author was Marie de France, early twentieth-century theories of their origin (both communal and individualist) mostly assumed all-male authors. (Virginia Woolf did not, and Mary Robinson in 1902 claimed that the form was primarily woman’s.) Women may indeed have played a leading part in fashioning as well as in performing and transmitting ballads. (This latter role is witnessed in the fourteenth century by John Barbour in The Bruce, 1875, and by a hostile preacher; in the eighteenth century by MSS collections, NLS and elsewhere.) Women are prominent and active in ballads; false sisters and lovers, murderers of their bastard babies, but also aggrieved, idealized or heroic women. . . . Plots turn on female sexuality, crimes of violence, heroines asserting themselves through perseverance or revenge, the independent girl who rejects suitors, the chaste woman falsely accused and vindicated, the loathly woman transformed to beauty by love and sexual courtesy. . . .(54).

In speaking of the relationship between ballads and the work of women troubadours. Francois Zuffery says there is no reason to rule out composition of ballads by women, and that ballads, at least French ballads, in some ways, exhibit the characteristics Zuffery notes as “fémininite textuelle” (39-40).

Of the 305 ballads in the Child collection, 200 involve women characters, but this fact does not make them feminist discourse. Rather the nature of many ballads allows them to be interpreted in terms of bodytalk. Ballads are oral, anonymous, utterly outside the confines—and confining rules of—official male discourse. It is through the body that the female characters “talk,” their corporeal nature defining who and what they are. For
instance, as has been shown in Chapter Two, female characters are defined according to the status of their bodies in 103 of the 200 ballads with women characters. The women in those 103 ballads are seen through a narrative voice that views them as if their bodies were the most important things about them. Thus, seeing what those women-as-bodies have to say can tell us about the choices the ballad singers, audiences and collector made and thereby give insight into their respective natures.

It is odd then that Child's ballads are so unlike the official discourse of the Middle Ages, the discourse of the clergy. Of the total 305 ballads in the Child collection, only eight are overtly Christian ["St. Stephen and Herod" (22), "Judas" (23), "The Cherry Tree Carol" (54), "The Carnal and the Crane" (55), "Dives and Lazarus" (56), and "Brown Robyn's Confession" (57), "The Wife of Usher's Well" (79), and "Sir Hugh, or The Jew's Daughter" (155)]. In the other 297 ballads, characters live out their lives as if their earthly realm is all there is. Apparently innocent folksongs, they convey an ancient message more akin to Anglo-Saxon fatalism than to Christian salvation, as Patricia Ingham has noted (29). When ballad lovers die, as they do in "Little Musgrave and Lord Barnard" (81), for instance, no mention is made about the disposition of the lovers' souls.

Different from the official discourse, too, is the view of womankind present in the ballads. Though the official discourse of the time represented by the ballads would like to say that womankind is inferior to mankind, many of the ballads subvert the orthodox view. Ballad women wield power.

According to Genivieve d'Harcourt, in *Life in the Middle Ages*, men were not permitted near their wives during childbirth, and often after the child was born, the father was kept separate from his wife (85). As one might expect, midwifery appears in popular
literature as the exclusive realm of women (Hughes 111), and so it appears in the Child collection. Men in the Middle Ages, says Muriel Hughes, associated women with childbirth and medicine when no distinction was made between natural phenomena and supernatural phenomena. There was some explanation for all occurrences; those which could not be explained by natural cause and effect were attributed to supernatural causes. “In an age of high infant mortality,” Hoyt explains, “it is not surprising, to the modern reader, that a large number of witches were elderly women who performed the service of a midwife” (619). “The people, Tyeryar explains, “looked to supernatural creatures not only to explain such natural phenomena as illness, insanity, and light, but also to provide a better understanding of their own relationships with other human beings” (1062A).

Consistent with the folklore that depicts women as evil was the religious view that women were inherently evil because of their sexual, physical nature—because of their bodies. The role of the temptress is applied to women in general, as the anthology Woman Defamed and Woman Defended illustrates. “In all the theological and chivalric conceptions of the time,” Southern recalls, “woman stood for that which was either below or above reason: woman, in the person of Eve, was the agent by which sin came into the world” (109). Georgiana Hill believes that this doctrine of inherent evil was used to enforce the doctrine of inferiority of women, when Hill states:

In order to enforce the doctrine of inferiority, the Church went further, and proclaimed that there was in woman a wickedness additional to the sin common to humanity. The “Eternal Feminine” was held before men’s eyes as a temptation to be warned against. To fly from the presence of woman was to resist evil. (vii)
Some ballads echo the explicit religious view of women as inherently evil.

"Riddles Wisely Expounded" (1 D) does not give a narrative; rather it contains a series of riddles in this format:

‘O what is higher than the trees?

Gar lay the bent to the bonny broom

And what is deeper than the seas?

And you may beguile a fair maid soon.’ (Child 1.5.1)

The riddles are then answered with the last answer being, “And the Devil’s worse than eer woman was” (I.5.10). Thus the ballad indicates that of all the evils in the universe, only the Devil himself is worse than “woman was,” that is, worse than Eve was in bringing about the Fall. Ironically, the man who can answer the riddles will be able to “beguile a fair maid soon,” indicating that the evil within woman made her no less desirable.

In other ballads, women yield readily to temptation but are excused from moral responsibility because of their supposed natural frailty as women. Because “women stood . . . for that which was below reason—caprice . . .,” they were not held morally accountable for their misdeeds by the same stringent criteria of good reason by which men were held accountable (Southern 109). That women were expected to be more susceptible to temptation is illustrated by “Willie O Winsbury” (100 A). While the king has been a prisoner in Spain, “Willie o the Winsbury / Has lain lang wi his daughter at hame” (Child 2.399.1). When the king returns, he questions his daughter’s altered appearance, and she confesses that she is pregnant. Then the king asks his daughter if the father of her child is of high rank. She answers,
'It is not to a man of might,' she said,

'Nor is it to a man of fame;

But it is to William of Winsbury;

I could lye nae langer my lane.'

(Child 2.399.7)

The king demands that Willie be brought before him to be hanged. When Willie appears, however, he is so handsome that the king declares:

'IT is nae wonder,' said the king,

'That my daughter's love ye did win;

Had I been a woman, as I am a man.

My bedfellow ye should hae been.

(Child 2.400.10)

In other words, any woman would have succumbed to William, none resisting. The king then offers Willie an earldom as a dowry for the daughter. Willie agrees to marry but refuses the earldom because he has eighteen corn mills already. Thus, the woman's indiscretion is forgiven by her father who can understand that any woman in her circumstance would have yielded. Viewed as one speaking with bodytalk, she is excused to do as she pleases, thereby subverting the strict moral code.

Georgiana Hill continues to use the theory of woman's inherent vice to explain woman's supernatural powers:

Once having disseminated the theory of woman's inherent vice, it was only a natural corollary to impute to her both the desire and the power of working ordinary mischief. The doctrine suited ages which believed not only in an
embodied omnipresent Power of Evil, but also in countless and multiform
expressions of that power through natural objects and phenomena. (ix)

Thus, the role of temptress is applied to women in general, explaining in part the awe
inspired in men by the liege ladies of courtly love. Evidence of this role of women as
temptress asserts itself in subtle ways. For instance, Sellery, in discussing medieval
schools, finds that boys and girls were occasionally educated together, citing this
reference from Froissart, who "speaks of being bothered in school by the presence of
‘ravishing little girls’" (358). Taylor explains how Good represented by man and Evil
represented by woman came into Christianity through Manicheism:

The system [Manicheism] called after Manes was a crass dualism, containing
fantastic and largely borrowed speculation as to the world and man. Satan was
there and all his devils. He was the begetter of mankind, in Adam. But Satan
himself, in previous struggles with good angels, had gained some elements of
light; and these passed into Adam’s nature. Eve, however, is dominated by
sensuality. After man’s engendering, the strife begins between the good and evil
spirits to control his lot. In ethics, of course, Manicheism was dualistic and
ascetic . . . . The insistence of the problem of evil and the drift to dualism were
likewise marked in the Gnostic creeds, which consisted chiefly of Persian and
Neo-Hellenic elements, but were affiliated with Christianity by the yearning for
salvation and drawn to the Christian pale (though not within it) by the giant figure
of the Saviour. (49-50)

Not only were women considered to be temptations themselves, but also they
were considered to be more susceptible to temptation than men. Because women were
thought to be incapable of the reason which men possessed, they were not as responsible for their moral actions. Southern states, “Women stood at once for that which was below reason—caprice—and for a higher principle than reason—love” (109). Thus, women were not expected to behave on the same moral plane with men. Often a woman’s failings were overlooked because she was “only a woman.” In actual life, beside the world of the ballad, husbands and fathers, then, were thought necessary to compensate for women’s lack of moral responsibility. The fact that controls against women were very strict, the fact that the Church regarded women as such strong temptations that many sermons were given on that subject, the fact that the Church accused womankind of full responsibility for the Fall of Man and the subsequent crucifixion of Jesus, and the fact that men felt women possessed secret powers beyond those men could have for their own—all these facts indicate that men saw in women great power, power that had to be controlled severely or avoided altogether.

If men—and women—within the non-industrial agrarian ballad audience associated women with supernatural powers, then it is not surprising that supernatural women, with grotesque or other worldly bodies, show up in the ballads. In some ballads, supernatural women present themselves in a form other than human, and in others supernatural women appear at first as loathly ladies and are later transformed into beautiful ladies.

In “Leesome Brand” a woman presents herself in a form other than human, the body talk coming through the agency of a female animal. “Leesome Brand” (15 A) gives a complicated narrative in which young Leesome goes to the king’s court to serve, only to become the lover of the king’s young daughter. When nine months have passed, the
daughter arranges for Leesome and herself to take her dowry and escape. As they ride away, the king’s daughter goes into labor. Leesome volunteers to serve as midwife, but the young mother refuses. Instead she insists that he go hunting, warning that he must not touch the “white hynde/For she is o the woman kind” (Child 1.183.28). Leesome forgets his lady while he is hunting. He sees the white hynde, remembers the warning, and consequently returns to his love only to find both mother and son dead. He goes immediately to his mother’s castle, lamenting in metaphorical terms his loss of “gowden knife and its sheath.” Then the mother tells him that there is a way to break the spell he has cast over his love and her son. He takes drops of “Saint Paul’s ain blude” (Child 1.184.44), drops it on the pair, and they revive. Thus the white hynde somehow magically embodies the spirit of the king’s daughter. Only breaking the magic spell by means of the saint’s blood could free her to live a normal, mortal life. And it took a woman, Leesome’s mother, to have knowledge of the magic at work and to have the blood with which to break the spell. Here both women characters participate in “bodytalk” by having insight to bring about a happy ending despite the man’s negligence.

“The Mermaid” (289 A) tells the traditional story of the beautiful half-woman/half-fish creature who lures sailors to destruction, the bodytalk coming from the non-human powers the mermaid’s fish tail gives evidence of. In this ballad a sea voyage is going quite well until the sailors sight “a mermaid on the rock, / With comb and glass in hand” (Child 5.149.2). Because she lures the sailors near her, the ship runs aground and subsequently sinks, with the sailors mourning not for their own lives but for their wives who will be husbandless and the mothers who will lose sons. Here we find the
bodytalk of a female who is all body, all object, and thereby brings those who dare to look upon her to their destruction, perhaps for their impertinence.

In "The Two Magicians" (44) both a man and woman have supernatural powers, and in this case, the man’s powers are perhaps greater than the woman’s. The bodytalk of the woman shows her in a duel of wits with the man as she transforms her body to suit her needs. A blacksmith tells a beautiful lady that he will have her maidenhead. She, of course, denies the blacksmith, but he declares, “I’ll cause ye be my light leman / For the hauf o that and less” (Child 1.402.6). She then turns herself into a turtle dove, but he also becomes a dove and follows her. She turns herself into an eel, but he becomes a speckled trout. She becomes a duck, but he becomes a drake and pursues her. She becomes a hare, but he becomes a greyhound and overtakes her. She becomes a grey mare, but he becomes a saddle and sits on her back. She becomes a hot griddle, but he becomes a hotcake on the griddle. She becomes a sailing ship, but he casts a nail into her tail to keep her from sailing away. The ballad ends this way, with the lady finally giving up to the blacksmith, thus illustrating in metaphorical terms the game of maintaining one’s chastity until one gives it up willingly:

Then she became a silken plaid,

And stretchd upon a bed,

And he became a green covering,

And gaind her maidenhead. (Child 1.403.14)

Here the bodytalk may interpret the lady’s actions to suggest she made her lover prove his worthiness until she was ready to take him as her lover.
From the following ballad, one can see that abiding by the wishes of the lady with a body not of normal flesh leads to special gifts and enlightenment for the man who will be guided by her wisdom. The supernatural lady in “Thomas Rhymer” (37) appears first as a very beautiful, mortal woman whose powers she uses to teach the man who at first regards her as mere beautiful object. A beautiful woman dressed all in green rides toward Thomas. He bows gravely and hails her “thou mighty Queen of Heaven: / For your peer on earth I never did see” (Child 1.323.3). She corrects his mistake by telling him that she is the Queen of Elfland. She takes him with her to Elfland where he must serve her seven years. They ride for forty days, seeing neither sun nor moon and hearing only the roar of the sea. They eventually come on a beautiful garden. Because they have traveled so long without eating, Thomas asks to present fruit to the queen, but she warns him that the particular fruit he wants to offer her would bring with it all the plagues in hell. She then produces a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine for their refreshment. She next gives him three messages of advice: the path of righteousness is the one with thorns and briers, the broad road is the path of wickedness, although some think it is the road to heaven, and the third road is the road to Fairyland. She warns him finally that he may not speak while in Fairyland. He follows all her advice, returning successfully after seven years of service, with a pair of “shoes of velvet green” as proof of his adventure. “According to a venerable Scottish legend, explains Friedman, “Thomas Rhymer of Erceldoune, a thirteenth, century poet, spent years in Elfland. At the end of his scjourn he won from the fairy queen the gift of prophecy that eventually made him as famous a seer as Merlin” (Friedman 39).
Contrary to the case in "Thomas Rhymer," supernatural ladies in some ballads appear first as loathly, their bodies devalued in the eyes of men, only to be transformed into beauties at the end of the ballads when they have been taken seriously as speaking subjects. "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31) is a rather long, complex narrative, paralleling the stories of the Arthurian cycle. It is also similar to Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale." Many ballads reflect certain motifs found in the medieval romances.

Hodgart explains the occurrence of such motifs:

British balladry also has a connection with the more courtly Romances of the Middle Ages. The stories which make up the Arthurian cycle were worked into a courtly form by Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth century, were expanded into a series of French prose Romances in the thirteenth century, and were translated and adapted into English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A number of motifs have been taken into the ballads from these Romances. For example, the motif of the sympathetic plants that spring from the lovers' graves comes from the Tristan series, which began in the twelfth century. Arthurian stories appear in "The Boy and the Mantle" (29), where the magic cloak is a test for chastity; in "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31), where the Loathly Lady is transformed by a kiss, and again, in "King Arthur and King Cornwall" (30). The non-Arthurian courtly Romances have also provided material for some of the ballads. "Sir Lionel" (18) has much in common with the romances Sir Eglamour of Artois and Eger and Grime. "Hind Horn" (17) has taken from the Horn cycle the motifs of the hero disguised as beggar and of the ring dropped into the cup as a sign of recognition. The closest relationship is shown by "Thomas Rhymer" (37), which
is derived directly from a fifteenth-century poem about Thomas of Erceldoune.

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In the ballad "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31), one sees bodytalk from the body of a loathly lady whose message is that she should not be judged by her body but to be taken seriously as a speaking subject. King Arthur must be ransomed from a giant by finding out what is the one thing women most desire. While Arthur is out seeking the answer, he encounters a very ugly lady who hails him courteously. Arthur finds her so disgusting that he cannot bring himself to hail her courteously. The ballad describes her his way:

Then there as shold haue stood her mouth,

Then there was sett her eye;

The other was in her forhead fast,

The way that she might see.

Her nose was crooked and turnd outward,

Her mouth stood foule awry;

A worse formed lady than shee was,

Neuer man saw with his eye.

(Child 1. 294.16-17)

Nevertheless, she promises to help him in his quest. He in return promises her his cousin, Sir Gawain, in marriage if she does indeed have the power to help him. When Arthur’s knights ride out to meet this “Misshappen hore,” Sir Kay comments on how horrible it would be to kiss her, but Gawain quiets him by explaining that he is promised to her in
marriage. The loathly lady gives Sir Gawain his choice: he may either have her ugly by
day and beautiful by night, or vice versa. Gawain gallantly tells her that she may have
her will in the matter. For his gallantry, she tells him that she will be transformed
permanently into a beautiful lady. Gawain reveals to Arthur that the thing women want
most is their own will; this ransoms Arthur, and Gawain and his beautiful bride return for
a celebration, now released from the spell cast by a stepmother. Thus, the body that
seemed so disgusting has wise messages for Gawain and the court that will be schooled
by the loathly lady.

The theme that what a woman really wants is her own will also appears in “King
Henry” (32) as another supernatural lady speaks through her grotesque body. King
Henry, having returned from a successful hunting trip, is confronted by a “griesly ghost”
who knocks on his door. The loathly lady is described this way:

    Her head hat the reef-tree o the house,

    Her middle ye mot wel span;

    He’s throned to her his gay mantle,

    Says, “lady, hap your lingean.”

    Her teeth was a’ like teather stakes,

    Her nose like club or mell;

    An I ken naething she ‘peard to be,

    But the fiend that won in hell.

(Child 1.299. 5-6)
She demands of King Henry meat. She asks for his berry brown steed, and he serves it to her. She demands more meat, this time taking the greyhounds. She wants still more meat, taking the gos-hawks, "Left naething but feathers bare" (Child 1.299.12). She demands drink from his horse's hide and finally demands a bed. He makes her a bed.

She then makes her most outrageous demand,

'tak aff your claiths, now, King Henry,

An lye down by my side!'

'O God forbid,' says King Henry,

That ever the like betide;

That ever the fiend that won in hell

Shoud streak down by my side.'

(Child 1.299.17)

When morning comes, the lady has been transformed into the most beautiful woman

King Henry has ever seen. The lady explains the reason for her transformation this way:

'For I've met wi mony a gentle knight

That's a gien me sic a fill,

But never before a courteous knight

That ga me a' my will.'

(Child 1.299.20)

Thus, this loathly lady is another who may be interpreted as one who demands to be taken seriously as a speaking subject, not an object, a body.
A similar bodytalk reading may be made of “Kemp Owyne” (34A). The loathly lady in “Kemp Owyne” (34 A) will be transformed only if Kemp Owyne gives her three kisses. The lady appears in the form of a sea monster, described as follows:

Her breath grew strang, her hair grew lang,
And twisted thrice about the tree.
And all the people, far and near,
Thought that a savage beast was she.

(Child 1.309.4)

When Kemp Owyn comes to rescue her from her loathly state, she gives him three items for his own protection—a royal belt to keep him from touching her deadly tail and fins, a royal ring to keep his blood from being drawn, and a royal brand again to keep him from touching tail or fin. With each item he gives her a kiss until “smilingly she came about, / As fair a woman as fair could be” (Child 1.309.12), showing that the apparent physical appearance was not the sum of the woman herself.

All of the ballads which present women as having exclusive powers illustrate on the part of men a certain fear of women. Interestingly, the idea that women must have their own way is implied in all the ballads in that women control what happens to them. Although men give lip service to keeping their women subservient, these works show that women characters did wield certain power over men, a power based on fear that the women might wield their powers against men if they were not placated.

One lesson bodytalk can teach us is that going against the grain, resisting the dominant culture, can punish women, with the female being cast out. In “Proud Lady Margaret” (47 C) we find a woman who wields powers and is said to be guilty of pride.
In the narrative a young hind squire comes to court Lady Margaret, declaring that if she will not grant him her love, he will die for her sake. She tells him that many others have died for her sake; their graves are growing green. Then she asks him a series of riddles, riddles that he answers satisfactorily. The young squire counters with a series of riddles which Lady Margaret answers. Lady Margaret exclaims that the young man has come closest to gaining the nine castles to which she alone is heir. He corrects her by saying that she is not the sole heir because he, her brother William, who was killed at sea, is also heir. She declares that if he be her brother William, she will go with him. He tells her that he is indeed dead and that she therefore cannot go where he goes. He then gives his reason for coming to his sister as follows:

‘Leave off your pride, jelly Janet,’ he says,

‘Use it not any more’

Or when you come where I have been

You will repent it sore.

“When you go in at yon church door,

The red gold on your hair,

More will look at your yellow locks

Than look on the Lord’s prayer.

“When you go in at yon church door,

The red gold on your crown;

When you come here I have been,
You'll wear it laigher down.

The jolly hin squire, he went away
In the twinkling of an eye,
Left the lady sorrowful behind,
With many bitter cry.

(Child 1.430.18-20)

Thus, this ballad echoes the typical medieval sermons against woman's greatest sin, Superbia, excessive pride. Superbia is explained as follows in a medieval homily, "Concerning Eight Vices and Twelve Abuses of This Ages": "The eighth sin is called Superbia, that is, in English, moodiness (pride). It is the beginning and end of all evils; it turned angels into horrible devils, and maketh man also, if he wax very proud, the associate of devils, who previously fell out of heaven through pride" (Morris 102).

But ballad women do not have to be guilty of an active sin to be regarded as evil. Even in the passive role women appear evil in that they yield to temptation more readily than men. In terms of bodytalk we may see women getting away with defying social conventions simply because they are mere women, simply because of their sex and not their individual merits or demerits. In "Young Andrew" (48), the handsome young man is welcomed enthusiastically by the lord's daughter, who tells him she has loved him seven years before they had an opportunity to meet face to face. After Young Andrew has "twise or thrise . . . pleased this may" (I.432.3), she asks him when they will be married. He puts her off until she steals five hundred pounds from her father's treasury and brings it to him. After he has counted the money, Young Andrew takes her up on a
high hill where he commands her to disrobe, layer by layer, so that he may take her fine clothing to his own lady whom he loves. When she is left with nothing covering her but her long hair which "couered her bodye down to the ground" (Child 1.433.17), he asks if she prefers to die or to go home to her father. She chooses the latter, saying her father and seven brothers will soon take care of Young Andrew. When she returns home, her father refuses to let her in, saying, "Away, away, thou cursed woman, / I pray God an ill death thou may dye!" (Child 1.434.28). These harsh words break her heart and she dies. The father expresses remorse for having preferred his gold to his daughter. Later a wolf and a bear kill Young Andrew, but the father's remorse is too late to save his daughter. Apparently, the daughter's readiness to yield to temptation brings misery to all involved. If, however, we give the ballad a resistant reading, we see that the lady is not at all to be blamed. She is the victim, an object of her seducer's lust and her father's greed.

Perhaps Lady Isabel in "Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight" (4 A) is somewhat more justified in her yielding to temptation as she is not tempted by a mortal but by an elf-knight. When Lady Isabel hears the elf-knight blowing on his horn, she says, "'If I had yon horn that I hear blowing, / And yon elf-knight to sleep in my bosom" (Child 1.55.2). As soon as she has spoken these words which express her desire to sin, the elf-knight leaps in at her window saying, "'It's a very strange matter, fair maiden,' said he, / 'I canna blow my horn but ye call on me" (Child 1.55.4). They then ride to the green wood together. There the elf-knight reveals his plan to murder Lady Isabel as he has previously murdered seven king's daughters. She convinces him to rest his head in her lap for a while, hoping that she can stroke his head soothingly enough to make him go to sleep. When the elf-knight is asleep, Lady Isabel murders him with his own sword,
saying, "If seven king’s –daughters here ye hae slain / Lye ye here, husband to them a’
" (Child 1.55.13). Luckily, Lady Isabel is able to use her wits to overcome the elf-knight, but it is her own yielding to his mating call that endangers her life. Furthermore, one must assume that the seven king’s daughters whom the elf-knight has murdered yielded to the seductive call of the elf-knight’s horn as Eve yielded to the persuasive serpent. Lady Isabel is the plucky heroine who gives the lie to the cliché of feminine frailty, thereby defying theoretical conventions, as a bodytalk reading would understand her role in the ballad.

The lady in “James Harris (The Daemon Lover)” (243 E) is seduced by a supernatural lover (though he is mortal in some versions), but unlike Lady Isabel, she is not able to overcome him, the bodytalk telling us of a woman who did not submit to the social conventions. The ballad begins with the lady’s asking her “long lost lover” where he has been for the last seven years. He explains that he has been seeking gold for her but now has returned to affirm his marriage commitment to her. He declares he gave up marriage to a princess in preference to her. Then he tells her that he has seven heavily laden ships waiting to take her away. “He casts a glamour oer her face, / And it shone like the brightest gold” (Child 4.367.8). She kisses her child goodbye and goes away with her lover. After she is seated on a golden chair and the ship is underway, her lover’s countenance changes. His cloven foot appears, causing the lady to cry. He asks her why she cries, and she answers that she weeps for the husband she has left behind. Then the Daemon Lover answers her questions, revealing her punishment for having forsaken her family to live with him:

‘O what a bright, bright hill is yon,
That shines so clear to see?'

'O it is the hill of heaven,' he said,

'Where you shall never be.'

'O what a black, dark hill is yon,

That looks so dark to me?'

'O it is the hill of hell,' he said,

'Where you and I shall be.'


This *motif* of the supernatural hill seen in “The Daemon Lover” also appears in the folklore of other peoples, most notably in Irish myths, an indication that bodytalk may be applied to a variety of discourses, including those on the most fundamental folk level, not merely that of high art. (Thompson III.24) The ballad ends, “He sunk the ship in a flash of fire, / To the bottom of the sea”( Child 3.367.18), indicating the religious belief that the Devil was actively at work to test the fidelity of Christian wives. One wonders if her punishment would have been so great if she had carried on a discreet affair with an earthly lover rather than abandoned her husband and children. Thus, when one applies bodytalk, one sees that the “plucky heroine” cannot always overcome the restraints of those in power as this ballad serves as a warning to women who might dare to stray.

Although women are present in some ballads as victims of temptation, they are more frequently presented as temptations themselves through the allure of their bodies. Many ballads, such as “Brown Robin” and all the ballads of courtly love discussed earlier in this work show women as temptresses who bring destruction to their men. In “Brown
Robin" (97 B), Young Mary is presented by her father to six Scots lords, but she prefers Brown Robin. She pays him "A hundred pun o pennies roun" (Child 2.370.5) to lure him to her "bigly bower." She convinces him, against his fears, that if he dresses as one of her maids, he will be safe to stay with her. When he has been in her bower for a while, Mary's father comes in, requesting that she serve him wine. She makes the excuse that she is feeling ill and must get some air in the good green wood, in order to allow her lover to escape. Unfortunately, a porter recognizes Brown Robin and ambushed him, killing him. Lady Mary then becomes so ill over the death of her lover that her father must come to her in the green wood. There she explains that the porter has "shot the fairest flower this day, / That would hae comfort me"" (Child 2.370.22). The father declares that the porter will be hanged for his murder, despite the fact that he committed the act which he thought was the service of his king. Therefore, "Brown Robin" illustrates how the allure of young Mary brought not only the destruction of her lover but of her porter as well. (In version A, however, the lovers escape, and in the C version the porter is bribed to help.)

"Brown Robin," like the ballads containing elements of courtly love, illustrates that the strong sexual temptation presented by a particular woman was powerful enough to bring on the destruction of her lover. On the other hand are those ballads in which love affairs end in marriage, having no elements of tragedy. Perhaps one can infer from this that men in the ballad audience were, naturally, aware of the power of sexual attraction, so that such a powerful force uncontrolled must ultimately bring chaos. Perhaps in those ballads with medieval origins the general insecurity of the time brought about by frequent disease and constant warfare compelled medieval man to make rational
sense of his world, to find the natural order and live by it, applying strict moral controls.

at least in theory if not in practice, to his own life. When man placed woman inferior to
him, making her less responsible for her moral welfare, and when he determined that
woman's main purpose was to bear children, he forced her into the role of object as her
proper place. As such a sex object, woman was certainly treated as material object, but at
the same time she wielded power over man because of her sexual attraction. Thus, the
apparent mere object of temptation becomes, in terms of bodytalk, the active speaking
subject who wields power over the lustful man.

The fact that four ballads (three treated here) deal with incest proves further that
men looked upon women as temptresses, seeing them as bodies above all other
considerations, the bawdy talk of the incestuous relationship being taboo. The bodies of
the women characters speak out against their defilement. In terms of bodytalk, the incest
ballads offer the ultimate condemnation of the objectification of women in that the
women should be not be regarded as carnal options. "Babylon" (14 A) tells of three
ladies who are confronted one at a time by a banished man. The strange man gives each
lady this choice: "'It's whether will ye be a rank robber's wife, / or will ye die by my
wee pen-knife?'" (Child 1.173.4). The first two sisters choose to die rather than marry
the rank robber. The third, when questioned, says that is her brother Baby Lon knew
about this robber, he would save her. At those words, the robber reveals that he is Baby
Lon himself. One would expect him to be horrified about having murdered his sisters,
yet his concern seems to be chiefly for suggesting an incestuous relationship with the
youngest sister as he says, "'O sister, sister, what have I done! / O have I done this ill to
thee!" (Child 1.174.16), rather than the expected, "O, have I done this ill to your sisters?"
(Other versions do show him focusing on killing the sisters.) He continues to indicate that his suggested incest and subsequent murders are unforgivable by taking his "ain sweet life."

"Sheath and Knife" (16 A), treated here earlier, uses a metaphor to speak of, and for, the woman's body and that of her baby born out of incest. When the young prince returns home from killed his sister at her behest, there is a celebration going on, but he does not participate. When someone asks him why he seems pained, he answers, ""I have lost a sheath and knife that I'll never / see again"" (Child 1.186.8). His father tells him that one of his sailing ships will bring him a good sheath and knife, but the prince answers, ""But sic a sheath and a knife they can never / bring to me"" (1.186.10). The crime of incest is so unmentionable that despite the fact that the incestuous relationship is well-known, the prince can speak of it only in metaphorical terms, indicating that the physical fact of the sister's body speaks for the silenced sister, telling of the crimes against her.

A metaphor also is employed in "The Bonny Hind" (50), also treated here earlier, to speak of, and for, the body of the sister who must be killed as a result of the act of incest. She is spoken of not as woman but as objectified hind. When the brother and sister realize their identities, the sister takes out a knife and stabs herself in the heart. Then her brother gives her burial in the woods without the benefit of a priest. When he meets his father, the young squire asks him to ""Sing O and O for my bonny hind, / Beneath yon hollin tree!"" (1.446.12). The ballad ends with the father speaking this painfully ironic stanza, indicating that the objectified sister may speak only through the ure of the hind:
‘O were ye at your sister’s bower,
     Your sister fair to see,
Ye’ll think no mair o your bonny hyn
     Beneath the hollin tree.’

(Child 1.447.17)

Ballads that tell of incest display the religious view of women as temptresses, but some ballads that do not show explicitly the religious view of women as evil show women behaving cruelly and thereby exerting resistance to the social and theoretical conventions presented in the narrative. In some of these ballads, mothers are cruel to their children and in others ladies deliberately destroy their lovers.

In the ballads in which mothers behave cruelly the implication is that, despite the fact they have been forced to bear children, they will eventually pay for their crimes, yet the emphasis in the ballads does not fall on punishment. That women might entertain the notion of killing their children, even the illegitimate ones, does not, from the ballads, appear to be unthinkable, whatever the eventual consequences. Jane Gallop, in Thinking through the Body, tells this of an informal meeting held by Adrienne Rich:

    A mother brutally murders her babies, the youngest two months old. The act seems inhuman; the perpetrator a monster. Yet Rich tells us that, in 1975,

    “every woman in that room who had children . . . could identify with her . . . We spoke of our own murderous anger at our children” (2).

The chilling bodytalk conclusion one draws here is that disposing of one’s child, of the product of one’s body, makes the most profoundly shocking statement of all, defying the social, moral, and theoretical conventions.
The B version of “Edward” (13) lends itself to an interpretation by bodytalk, in that one of the speakers in the poem is the mother, the conventionally silent figure, the object of the oedipal triangle. “Edward” (13 B) follows a scheme of expostulation and reply. The mother asks Edward why his brand drops with blood, and he replies that he has killed his hawk because he had no more use for it. She argues that his hawk’s blood was not that red, and he replies that he has killed his horse. She argues that the horse was old and that he could have had another. Finally, Edward admits that he has killed his father. In this Oedipal triangle, however, the mother does not condemn herself to death as Jocasta does. She, rather, asks Edward what penance he will do for his sin. He says that he will set himself adrift at sea, thereby giving the “proper” Oedipal answer of banishing himself. She asks what he will do with his towers and his halls, and he replies that he will let them all fall down. She asks him what he will leave his wife and children, and he answers that he will leave them to become roaming beggars. Finally, she has her own guilt exposed when the mother asks what he will leave her. Edward answers,

‘The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,

Mither, mither,

The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir.

Sic counseils ye gave to me o.’

(Child 1.170.7)

Thus, Edward’s mother is revealed as the cause of his crime, a crime of murder that may follow implied incest with his mother. The mother, the first forbidden love object, as Freud would call it, has found herself violated in some way and has responded by undoing her son.
Perhaps the motive for Mary Hamilton’s murder is more understandable than the motive in “Edward.” In terms of bodytalk, Mary Hamilton is the silenced speaking subject who is condemned to silence and the death because a powerful man used her as an object. Mary Hamilton murders her illegitimate child. Mary has become pregnant with the child of the king, “the highest Stewart of them all.” She destroys her baby by throwing it into the sea. The old queen comes to her for the child, and because Mary cannot bring forth the baby, she is tried in court and found guilty. The night before her execution she drinks the health of the sailors, saying they should not let her parents know what she has done. The ballad ends this way, perhaps indicating that her story could be the story of any woman:

‘Last night I washd the queens feet,

And gently laid her down:

And a’ the thanks I’ve gotten the nicht

To be hangd in Edinbro town!

‘Last nicht there was four Maries,

The nicht there’l be but three;

There as Marie Seton, and Marie Beton,

And Marie Carmichael, and me.’

(Child 3.385.17-18)

As in “Mary Hamilton,” the mother in “The Cruel Mother” (20 B) kills her own baby, in what is perhaps the ultimate defiant statement bodytalk can make—to take the what was once a part of one’s body and destroy it. The mother gives birth alone
outdoors, indicating that the child is illegitimate and must be therefore kept secret. Then she murders the baby with her “little pen-knife” and buries it by moonlight. The narrative gaps; the mother is at church and sees a baby there, possibly a real child but more probably a statue of the infant Jesus or the ghost of her murdered child. On seeing the baby, she exclaims, “O sweet, babe, and thou were mine, / I wad cleed thee in the silk so fine” (Child 1.22.6). Then a voice speaks through the baby, “O mother dear, when I was thine, / You did na prove to me sae kind”” (Child 1.220.7)

For the ballad “Lord Randal” (12 A) Helena Michie’s work Sororophobia may add to the bodytalk interpretation, in that the younger, presumably more supple woman has used her body against her lover, who is being comforted by the older body of his first love, his mother. If one were to read against the grain, it is possible to see the true love to be a rival to the mother. Perhaps Michie’s view of sororophobia would be helpful in viewing this ballad. She reminds us that woman is associated with the Other, that which is the object of what Laura Mulvey has called “the gaze.” Michie goes on the say that especially among Victorians was the woman as other also the “other woman,” that rival who defined (and still defines) woman in her rightful place challenged by a woman who would take that place given the chance. Michie calls the tension created by such rivalry between the woman and the “other woman” as sororophobia. To be sure, in the ballads where mothers appear, the relationship of mother to son and true love to son is problematic. Following a scheme of expostulation and reply, where the mother is given her own voice, the young lord carries on a dialogue with his mother, these lines repeating, ‘mak my bed soon, / For I’m wearied wi huntin, an fain wad lie / down’” (Child 1.157.1). First, Lord Randal’s mother asks where he has been, and he answers that he has been in
the green wood. She asks whom he met there, and he answers that he met his true love. His mother asks what she gave him, and he replies that she gave him fried eels, a poisonous dish. The mother asks what he did with the leavings from the eels, and he answers that he fed them to his hawks and hounds that subsequently died. Then the mother exclaims that her son has been poisoned. She asks him what he will leave her, and he replies that he will leave her twenty-four milk cows. She asks what he will leave his brother, and he replies that he will leave his lands. Finally, she asks what he will leave his true love, and he answers this way:

'I leave her hell and fire; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

(Child 1.158.10)

The economy of this ballad contributes to its poignancy in that no reason is given for the cruelty, and the words "for I am sick at heart" indicate not only the physical illness from the poison but the emotional illness of a broken heart.

"In "The Queen of Scotland" (301), a lover is able to live happily as a result of his experience with a powerful woman whose bodily femininity is restored because of her self-sacrifice, a narrative that shows the woman conforming to social conventions, not resisting. In this ballad one sees the agency of two powerful women. Troy Muir is asked by the queen to come to her "bigly bower" to drink wine. He declines her invitation, saying that he is not worthy of her. Then the queen becomes much more explicit as she says, "There is a bed that is well made, / Where you and I shall sleep" (V.177.3). He again declines, saying that he could never violate the king by touching his queen's body. Having heard this rejection, the queen plots to work some evil on Troy Muir. She tells
him that if he lifts a particular stone, he will find great qualities of gold under it. When Troy lifts the stone, however, a large serpent wraps itself around his middle. He exclaims that he never thought the queen, his friend, would do such a thing to him. As he tries to think of some means to free himself from the snake, a lovely maid comes by, attracting the snake to “Cut aff her fair white pap” (Child 5.177.14). When this happens, Troy is freed. He declares his love for the maid and proposes marriage. Nine months after they are married, she gives birth to her son, her breast is restored, and the family prospers.

Jane Burns in Bodytalk says, “I want to record how medieval heroines can speak both within and against the social and theoretical conventions that construct them” (7). In the ballads selected for treatment here, I have shown how selected female ballad characters may be read as objects the conventions impose on them while others may be seen to defy those conventions that impose objectification.

Bodytalk’s application to the idea of the Lacanian father is in the way it lets us read around the official male discourse of Child’s scholarly, and therefore masculine-gendered, discourse. Even though practiced by both men and women, scholarly presentations such as Child’s are characteristically Western, privileging logic over feeling, linearity over circularity, the mental over the physical etc., and are therefore gendered masculine, regardless of the sex of one engaging in such scholarship. By making the Lacanian move of bringing all the ballad under his control, Child paradoxically makes possible a reading against the grain, so that feminists may hear his ballad heroines talk in a way that may not have occurred to him, in a way that is out of the control of male domination through the gaze, the “specular logic” of which Burns writes. As mentioned earlier, Child believed his work would seal the account for ballad
collecting. Despite his expectations, his work inspired a good deal of collecting, allowing him to become the metaphorical father to other collectors. Similarly, as he may have believed the works inside his collection to speak unambiguously, he may not have considered the voices of the women's bodies within those work. It is works about those bodies that make up a third of his collection, and it is those bodies speaking that make the ballads of special interest to the feminist critics who hear them.
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