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NURSERY POETICS: AN EXAMINATION OF LYRIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHILD IN TENNYSON'S "THE PRINCESS"

By Anna Jane Barton

"THE PRINCESS," TENNYSON's narrative poem about a radically feminist princess and a cross-dressing prince, framed by an imagined argument between Victorian men and women concerning the role of women in modern society, has, understandably, formed the central text in a number of articles about nineteenth-century gender poetics. Critics have been eager to engage with the fictional authors of the narrative, casting Tennyson as, on the one hand, a bastion of Victorian patriarchy, and on the other a subversive feminist. Donald E. Hall, in an essay, published in his collection *Fixing Patriarchy*, is the most persuasive advocate for a masculinist Tennyson, presenting "The Princess" as undertaking a project of "subsumption," in which the words and demands of the women are "ingested, modified and incorporated by the patriarch" (46).[1] In an article entitled: "Marginalized Musical Interludes: Tennyson's Critiques of Conventionality in 'The Princess,'" Alisa Clapp-Itnyre provides a representative case for the defence, presenting the lyrics as "pivotal feminist commentaries" that work to interrupt and deconstruct the male narrative (229).[2] Herbert Tucker locates a third way, identifying the poem as a "textbook Victorian compromise" (*Tennyson* 352). He argues that it "avoids taking a position on a hotly debated issue by taking up any number of positions" and characterizes this compromise, not as a commitment to portraying a complex contemporary issue with integrity, but as the result of Tennyson's not caring particularly either way: "neither the rallying of Victorian feminism" he writes, "nor the patriarchal status quo was sufficient stimulus to commitment" (352). In order to open up a new line of enquiry into "The Princess" I would like to look beyond the gender questions that continue to be batted back and forth amongst Tennyson's critics and to offer the figure of the child as an alternative and more powerful cultural, aesthetic and professional stimulus to Tennyson's poem.

The child makes regular appearances in the gender debate concerning "The Princess," but is usually inseparable from the mother-figure: women are the children of the poem and are either destined to be kept thus or are offered some emancipatory power by their role as mothers.[3] Various characters and groups are often recognized as becoming children at certain points in the narrative: the women in their university are children in a nursery, the men become their children when they are brought, injured and helpless, within the walls of the university to be nursed back to health. But, rather than privileging childhood, such

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insights make it into a way of exploring aspects of adulthood, be they masculine or feminine, valuable or restrictive. By using the child in this way, I would suggest that critics are following Tennyson's lead. The story of the child in "The Princess" is laden with aesthetic, cultural and professional anxiety that not only stimulates its composition but also creates a desire to destroy, hide or lose that stimulus. Just as has happened in recent criticism of "The Princess," the published poem itself so overburdens the child with social and gendered signification that it becomes almost completely lost.

On the 21st of November 1882, in a letter to S.E. Dawson, his publisher at the time, Tennyson wrote:

> You would be still more certain that the child was the true heroine [of "The Princess"] if instead of the first song as it now stands, "As through the land at eve we went," I had printed the first song which I wrote, "The Losing of the Child." The child is sitting on the bank of the river and playing with flowers; a flood comes down; a dam has been broken through – the child is borne down by the flood; the whole village distracted; after a time the flood has subsided; the child is thrown safe upon the bank and there is a chorus of jubilant women. I quite forget the words of the ballad but I think I may have it somewhere. (*Letters* 3. 238)

There are a number of grounds for scepticism regarding these remarks, not least their belatedness. By telling stories of and about an unpublished lyric more than thirty years after the publication of the poem in which it did not appear, Tennyson constructs a myth of loss around the unadopted lyric. Tennyson makes a strong claim for the explanatory power of "The Losing of the Child," but he does so within the history of its absence from a published poem, the argument of which it is supposed to make clear. This is framed by a performance of forgetting and potentially losing the ballad. Its omission goes unexplained, its being forgotten causes no concern and its physical whereabouts appear hardly to be considered: this myth is loaded so heavily as to suggest that the poem is being rewritten by the story of its absence. For it is only in the losing of it that Tennyson is able confidently to figure its meaning.

Finding and reading this mythologized lyric is a disappointing experience:

> The child was sitting on the bank,
>   Upon a stormy day.
> He loved the river's roaring sound;
>
> The river rose and burst his bound,
> Flooded fifty leagues around,
> Took the child from off the ground,
>   And bore the child away.
>
> O the child so meek and wise,
>   Who made us wise and mild!
> All was strife at home about him,
> Nothing could be done without him;
> Father, mother, sister, brother,
> All accusing one another;
>   O to lose the child!
> The river left the child unhurt,
>   But far within the wild.

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Then we brought him home again,
Peace and order come again,
The river sought his bound again,
The child was lost and found again,
And we will keep the child.
(*Poems* 848–49)

Tennyson composed "The Losing of the Child" in April 1849 along with a number of songs to be included in the 1850 edition of "The Princess." His decision, finally, to exclude this unprepossessingly curious little poem is unsurprising. That Tennyson is so convinced, in his letter, of its argumentative power, is the matter that seems to require explanation, for the poem itself seems scarcely of more value found than lost.

That it might, in fact, be more valuable lost, is suggested by an examination of the two alternative textual manifestations of "The Losing of the Child," the first being the prose paraphrase in the letter to Dawson; the second being a fictional lyric, composed by "The Princess" herself. The paraphrase with which Tennyson supplies his editor is not wholly inaccurate. That the child is playing with flowers on the riverbank and that the "whole village," rather than just the child's family members is affected by events, are expansions that might be identified as part of Tennyson's performance of forgetting. However the prose account does provide a significant gloss on the lyric voice by stating that the poem concludes with "a chorus of jubilant women." Although, within the fiction of "The Princess'" composition described in the Prologue, it is the women who *perform* the songs that fall between each part of the story ("and the women sang/ Between the rougher voices of the men," Prologue 23–27), it does not follow that the voices of the songs themselves must also be feminine. Indeed, the song by which "The Losing of the Child" was replaced for publication is masculine ("As through the land at eve we went/ And plucked the ripened ears, / We fell out, *my wife and I*," "The Princess" 1ˆ2. 1–3, emphasis mine). Any such gendering is absent from "The Losing of the Child." The voice is elusive: it cannot be located within the child's family, about which it speaks with a detached, sing-song, even archly amused tone: "Father, mother, sister, brother, / All accusing one another, / O to lose the child!" (12–14); its only involvement comes with the final declaration: "And we will keep the child" which destabilizes the happy resolution of the child's recovery by placing it in the keeping of the anonymous narrators (21). By recasting these narrators as a chorus of women, Tennyson refuses this small, lyric mystery.

To identify this lyric voice as feminine is to apply a gendered commentary not only to this short lyric, but to "The Princess" as a whole. As I began by pointing out, Tennyson is keen to claim that this lost lyric clarifies the meaning of the poem from which it has been removed. With this in mind, it becomes impossible to ignore the gendering of the child itself, male in the original lyric: "All was strife at home about him; / Nothing could be done without him" (10–11); female in Tennyson's later account: "the child was the true heroine" (2. 96). In his letter, Tennyson may be referring to Aglaia, the infant daughter of Psyche, advisor to Princess Ida, who has been held up as "the metachild of the songs" (Albright 238) and much can be made of this particular child's role in the poem's narrative. But Tennyson's continued and repeated reference in his letter to that universal "the child" (a significantly accurate memory of his misplaced manuscript) is carried into his turn towards gendered specifics. When the lost male child is found to be female, its gender assumes a significance previously held by its childishness. Tennyson can be recognized as aligning the infantile and the feminine.

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The second textual manifestation of the lyric again seeks to use the child as metaphor for femininity. In Part One of "the Princess," Ida's father, explaining to The Prince how it is that his betrothed is not willing to be married, describes poetry as the medium through which her wayward feminist leanings were expressed:

> . . . then, Sir, awful odes she wrote,
> Too awful, sure, for what they treated of,
> But all she is and does is awful; odes
> About this losing of the child; and rhymes
> And dismal lyrics, prophesying change . . .
> (1. 137–41)

This passage is often used in the ongoing debate about the gender ideology of "The Princess." However, no one has yet sought to compare Ida's "awful ode . . . about this losing of the child," with Tennyson's lyric of that title. On doing so it becomes apparent that Ida's ode and Tennyson's lyric cannot be one and the same. Ida embodies the image suggested in the prologue by Lilia, who desires to be: "Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then, / That love to keep us children" (Prologue 132–33). It is in Ida's dialogue that the infantalized state of the female is given metaphorical weight and, prior to her conversion to right-thinking femininity, she is consistently hostile towards children and child-bearing. There can be little doubt then, that her poems must cast the losing of the child as an imperative feminist action; indeed, Gama recalls her as having made explicit commitment in favor of loss: ". . . they had been, she thought, / As children; they *must* lose the child" (1. 135–36). Tennyson's lyric, presenting this loss as an occasion of fear and confusion, and concluding with its reversal through finding and resolving to keep the child, seems to commit itself to an antithetical stance, and thus we are presented with two lyrics that express opposing ideologies under the same title. It is at this point that we might begin to fall into a gender debate: Tennyson can be understood as taking Ida's lyric and rewriting it, defeating her with her own words. This would be convincing, were it not for the fact that Tennyson's lyric was omitted from the published poem so that Ida's feminist commitment to the losing of the child becomes the only argument allowed to remain. But even this is inadequate, for what must be recognized as the point of identification for these two lyrics is their textually constructed unavailability. Just as Tennyson works to lose his "Losing of the Child" beneath accounts of and about it, so Gama's account of his daughter's awful odes successfully loses the poems themselves, again through a turn to gender ideology.

If these texts were both available, it can be hypothesized that they would cancel each other out, emptying their shared title of ideology, by simultaneously committing it to two opposing views. I would suggest that this is achieved even more powerfully by the silence that results from the conspicuous textual absence of the two lyrics. Such silence empties the title of any potential for active commitment. "The Losing of the Child" becomes an obsessively repeated inscription of anxiety, which, in its inarticulacy, might be characterized as at once childish, lyrical and Tennysonian.

Childhood, though not invented by the Victorians, became the subject of a new and more concentrated interest throughout the nineteenth century:

> Even while we concede that Victorians inherited from older generations their interest in childhood and some of their ideas about it, we may legitimately contend that Victorian conceptions of childbearing,

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> the state of being a child and of the emotional importance of children to a society dominated by adults took on such a weight as to represent something new in Western history. Never before had childhood become an obsession within the culture at large. (Nelson 68)

In *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1830*, Carolyn Steedman examines the changing perceptions of "the child" in the long nineteenth century. She demonstrates how the cultural inheritance of the early nineteenth century ensured that infancy would be idolized and mystified as a time of innocent wisdom, impenetrable to adult consciousness, "lost in the individual past and in the past of the culture," while the new awareness of history and humanity as progressive, figured the child as that which would surpass its parents, lending it an awful and murderous futurity that signified the mortality of the present (10). Similarly, writing in a section entitled "Optimism" in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, Walter Houghton describes the Victorians as having a new understanding of themselves within history, "which was not a 'stop and go' process in which advance waited upon particular events, but a natural and organic development in which each age *was the child* of the previous one" (29, emphasis mine). The choice of vocabulary here is Houghton's, but it is still an apt description of the Victorian hankering after childhood as a space and a quality which they might themselves possess, thus making it a quality of adulthood. This is something that I have suggested that Tennyson himself, and successive critics, share when writing about "The Princess"; indeed the poem's narrator echoes Houghton, saying in the conclusion: "This fine world of ours is but a child/ Yet in the go cart" (Conclusion 77–78).

That the child should contain within it a desirable past and future, both out of adult reach, fills the incomprehensible infant cry with a threatening potency and so the physical presence of the child itself represented a threat to Victorian optimism. The development of nursery culture during the nineteenth century can be understood as a response to this threat. The nursery, the domestic space where the child is housed and educated, makes the child safe, not only from but also for adult society. By surrounding a space that cannot be penetrated with another culturally accessible and defined space, the nursery overwrites its infantile detainees with a legible text. Nurseries having existed as separate rooms in which children were brought up since the fifteenth century; it was only in the Victorian period that "nursery" was used as an adjectival prefix for furniture, wallpaper and, most significantly, books.[4] There was a huge increase in the amount and range of children's literature published in the nineteenth century: picture books, nonsense and fantasy, religious tracts, periodicals for children and instructional stories and poems (Nelson 74). In his recent study of the Victorians, A.N. Wilson uses nursery literature as a "prism" through which to view the 1860s, claiming that "in the Victorian day nursery a picture of the world could emerge, simply from reading the books on offer to a child of hat time, which would not differ materially from turning the less interesting pages of *Hansard* or *The Times*" (260). To be able to read the adult social world through a reading of the nursery implies the extent to which the nursery was an anxiously constructed microcosm of what lay beyond it. The child can be seen as being characterized (perhaps colonized would not be too strong a word) by means of culturally available materials: it is effectively lost through its keeping.

Not only did the Victorians produce literature to over-write the child, they also sought to read its infantile language. In a chapter entitled "Physiological Bodies" (*Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1830*), Carolyn Steedman traces the "professionalisation of childcare" in the early years of Victorian Britain during

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which doctors and parents became interested in the interpretation of the bodies of their children (63). Steedman cites a series lectures "On the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood" (1848), in which Charles West spoke about "interrogating children": "for though the infant cannot talk, it has yet a language of its own, and this language it must be your first language to learn . . . it is a language of signs." She also refers to a collection of "Letters to a Mother on the Watchful Care of her Infant" (1831), which offered the mother the assurance that, "the little infant's countenance will offer . . . the most interesting and most intelligent page in nature's book"; and to M. E. Bouchout's "Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Children" (trans 1855), which included a chapter devoted to the interpretation of "The Cry" (quoted in Steedman 63–69). What Steedman characterizes as "an enlightenment injunction" is an attempt to recapture the lost state of childhood by locating within it a rational, adult sign system. Although, on a practical level this project values and invests in the child, it is also another anxiety-laden attempt to subsume and colonize, that replaces the voice of the child with that of the professional expert.

It is this impenetrable, languageless (literally, infantile), articulation uttered by the child in the nursery that I would like to name lyrical, so that the identification between lyric and lyric subject can expand beyond the story of one lost lyric to include the lyric form. In doing so I am adopting Matthew Rowlinson's claim that "the genre of lyric poetry in Victorian Britain was, for the first time, fully implicated in the production of printed text as a commodity" (60). When it became "newly totalized in print," the oral tradition of lyric was effectively silenced by its own composition and publication and hence it is appropriate that unheard or incomprehensible voices should become a "generic convention" in nineteenth-century lyric poetry (60). Lyric was inserted into narrative poems as "a defense against narrative," appearing as an "unassimilated fragment or as an excess that frames that whole" (64, 62). Rowlinson also demonstrates how "the print lyric was able to incorporate the totality of its own antecedents, becoming the medium for a coherent summing up of its own history" (77). The child's cry, a voice that cannot be reproduced or understood on the page, is one manifestation of the lyric. The child itself, holding a past and a future that cannot be reached by its parents, might represent "the novel historical function of the print lyric as a totalizing form that at once preserves and supersedes its multiple predecessors" (64). Cultural concerns about the child in nineteenth-century England can therefore be mapped onto aesthetic concerns about the Victorian lyric.

Before moving on to discuss how these concerns were brought to bear on Tennyson's profession and the composition and publication of "The Princess," it is worth placing the subsumption of child and lyric in the context of gender politics specifically. Both Steedman, in her literary and cultural history of Victorian childhood, and Rowlinson, in his consideration of the nineteenth century lyric, have made observations about the way gender has altered out perceptions of each. In the introduction to *Strange Dislocations*, entitled "Lost and Found," Steedman is eager to point out that our gendered way of seeing makes it difficult to understand how irrelevant gender was to the Victorian understanding of childhood, "It is important to recognize that we currently live (and write history) at the end of a process that has both sexualized children and very determinedly assigned to them a sex. . . . It is extremely difficult for us to imagine ways in which a century ago, gender was of little importance in the usual sort of thinking about children" (9). Her observations locate Tennyson's gendering of his lost child within a historical process that has assimilated the androgynous child-figure into a gendered society. Rowlinson detects this process at work in another minor Tennysonian

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lyric, "The Skipping Rope," in which the arbitrary rhyme scheme provided by a rhyming dictionary (a book which "appears to generate language without discourse"), is translated into a conversation between a girl and her would-be suitor, "naturalizes the mechanical production of difference in rhymes, but only at the cost of a preoccupation with sexual difference" (Rowlinson 61). In both historical and literary contexts, gender supplies the method of domestication.

W. H. Auden described Tennyson as "the poet of the nursery" citing the following stanza from *In Memoriam* to illustrate his description (228): "So runs my dream: but what am I?/ An infant crying in the night:/ An infant crying for the light:/ And with no language but a cry" (qtd. in Auden 28). He is highly critical of the "infantile torpor" that characterizes Tennyson's lyrics as Victorian, but his reference to the nursery rather than the child itself recognizes Tennyson's own response to anxieties about the lyric as similarly defined by the age in which he was writing (28). In so doing he continues a trend, established by early readings of Tennyson, to put the poet in rooms: to find his work too domestic in its scope and too culturally specific in its themes. Writing in the *National Review* in October 1859, Walter Bagehot dismissed Tennyson as a "kind of drawing-room Wordsworth" (53); a review of "The Princess" by Charles Peter Chretien accuses the poet of "swimming only in the shallow waters of taste" and laments that "with all his great beauties he must be, comparatively, the poet of the day. The present is so exclusively his sphere that he cannot transcend it" (220); and Herbert F. Tucker has brought this domestic reading of Tennyson up to date, recognizing the young poet's "continuing ambition to absorb and reproduce the domestic sprit of the age" by meeting "current tastes for poetry that validated the domestic scenario" ("House Arrest" 543). By choosing the nursery as the domestic space in which Tennyson has confined himself, Auden names this domestication, this confinement to the social and contemporary, a response to the specific problem of the child. It is this response can be observed in Tennyson's composition and publication of "The Princess."

Published at the mid-point of his career and of the nineteenth century, "The Princess" was immediately recognized as Tennyson's fulfillment of a long-held ambition to compose a long narrative poem and was anticipated as such by contemporary poets and critics.[5] His only previous attempt of any significance was "The Lover's Tale," a poem with which he was never satisfied, only allowing it to be published two decades later in order to prevent the circulation of pirate copies. "The Princess," by contrast, he was keen to publish, marking as it did, a break away from the work in lyric with which he had so far made his reputation. Although the poem sold well, it disappointed critical expectations. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, on hearing the poem's subject matter, wondered: "isn't the world too old and fond of steam, for blank verse poems, in ever so many books to be written on the fairies?" (qtd. in Tennyson, *Poems* 741) and Chretien describes it as "an improvement, if any, that was not a development" (201). These comments are themselves indications of the cultural commitment to the progressive self and society that Houghton describes as definitive of "The Victorian Frame of Mind": Barrett Browning implies that she wishes Tennyson would grow up, and join the adult world that is "too old" for such nonsense, while Chretien loads "development" (a word so often used now with reference to the education of children) with a value that is over and above that of the more static "improvement." The tepid reception of "The Princess" might be offered as evidence of its failure entirely to "lose the child," so that the infant cry at its center can still be heard. However, rather than subscribing to a reading of "The Princess" as a failure and so re-inscribing that frame of mind that equates value with progress, I would like to recognize

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in it the construction of a poetic nursery, organized by the infantile lyrics that made up his professional memory and motivated by a cultural pressure to move forward from them.

The poem takes place within a number of nursery spaces. The first of these nurseries contains the events of the Prologue. The broad, walled lawns that Sir Walter Vivian gives up to his people for one day are a constructed space of play, held safe within the designated limits of time and place. His toys instruct the children that his home contains, so that they might successfully progress into Victorian Britain. All that is British and Victorian is here to play with. For example, evolutionary history is fashioned into "toys of lava"; ancestral history is told as a "hoard of tales"; science is presented as a game for girls – "a group of girls / In circles waited, whom the electric shock / Dislinked with shrieks of laughter" – and the great age of steam and of the telegraph is reproduced in miniature: "A dozen angry models jetted steam: / A petty railway ran . . . And there through twenty posts of telegraph / They flashed a saucy message to and fro/ between the mimic stations" (Prologue 10–88). The story that is told on this day within these walls, then, is a nursery story. It too is presented as "a pleasant game" similar but preferred to "magic music, forfeits, all the rest" (Prologue 191, 192). But, just as Sir Walter's fair seems "smacking of the time," so this play-poem must be "made to suit with Time and Place" (Prologue 89, 224). And so, it is appropriate that this story should itself house a nursery. The university, which was originally to have given the poem its title, is a nursery for all who enter its walls, making them its children and therefore reconstructing and socializing them. Although founded on the whim of a willful child, the money by which it is supported, and, most significantly, the building in which it is contained, belong to the parent (it is Gama's summer palace), so that again the child is materially separated from (the palace is on the very frontier of the kingdom), contained by, and eventually subsumed by the adult world that she initially threatened. It is Ida's poetry, her "awful odes . . . about this losing of the child," that Gama recognizes as the threat that persuades him to allow Ida her nursery (1. 139–40). It is from their sound (silenced by Tennyson's text) that he seeks "but peace," and so it is with relief that he responds to Ida's request – "At last she begged a boon" – as a means to achieve her silence, to lose her and still to keep her (1. 143, 145).

These nurseries that house the storytellers and the story are themselves housed by the nursery of the poem itself, of which they are the formative furnishings. Tennyson's poem is crammed full of the material of contemporary social debate, to the extent that it was distasteful to contemporary critics. It, more than any of what it describes, "smacks of the age" making itself available as (what Wilson found Victorian literature to be) a poetic container of the age in which it was written. To list these materials briefly, "The Princess" houses The Woman Question, evolution theory, Empire, industrialization, education, the threat of revolution, and the class system. But, more relevant to the examination of the lyric that began this discussion, is the narrative blank verse that Tennyson chooses for his poem. That it is this form in which Tennyson seeks to lose his lyrics and that its composition and publication were achieved with acute professional awareness reflect the commercial success of fictional publications in a mass market that increasingly "shunned the previously dominant form of the lyric poem" (Felluga 173).[6] Bound to these commercial concerns is the form of the blank verse narrative, which both reflects and informs the new awareness of the culture in which it seeks to work. As a "poet of the nursery," Tennyson composes a socially engaged blank verse poem that holds at its center another kind of poem (the lyric) that it is working to subsume. It is, however, this silent, impenetrable, central space and the anxiety it induces that must drive his work (as the child organizes society "about" its silent self in his lost lyric).

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"The Princess" tells the story of the development of a young man and woman into right-thinking, socialized adults in a form that reflects and so naturalizes that development. One line runs into the next without a backwards glance, building itself towards the conclusion which is itself restless, ending as it does with the Prince's entreaty to Ida to move forward to greater accomplishment and discovery with him:

> ". . . O we will walk this world
> Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
> And so through those dark gates across the wild
> That no man knows. Indeed I love thee: come,
> Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are one:
> Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;
> Lay thy sweet hands to mine and trust to me."
> (4. 339–45)

This proposed "walk" towards an "end," as yet unknown to man, in which Prince and Princess might "accomplish" their own humanity is a mission statement for evolution and gives the lie to the characterization of his poem with which the narrator opens the conclusion: "So closed our tale, of which I give you all/ The random scheme as wildly as it rose" (Conclusion 1–2). The "wild rising" of this "random scheme" is pre-empted by the "wild" that it is the Prince's project to traverse and so reveal as constructed, ordered and known.

Part of the evolutionary construction of this narrative nursery can be traced in its self-reflexive history of revision into print. The story that it tells as the textual record made by one man of a medley developed out of a summer afternoon game, can be understood as characteristic of that cultural and poetic frame of mind that I have called Victorian. As I suggested above, and as has been frequently recognized by critics of the poem, the random wildness of the many voices is entirely lost in the poem's published form, the narrator's self-conscious description of the work serving only to draw attention to its evolutionary progress from its origins into print. The absolute unity of voice that is maintained as the poem moves from one part to the next (and, we are told, from one narrator to the next) serves as the strongest evidence for the work done by revision into and within printed text. The unity of narrative voice was itself a revision made by Tennyson towards the end of the ten-year process that finally produced the published poem; at one point he named each new narrator at the beginning of each new part. This extensive period of revision, dramatized by the narrator, reveals the published poem as having been subject to its own progressive process, a process during which "The Losing of the Child" was lost.

Tennyson's losing of "The Losing of the Child" both from "The Princess" and from his memory works to create a silence that might then be filled by a non-lyrical, socialized version of itself. But the silent child that travels through the poem serves as a potent reminder of the silenced lyric. The uproar concerning the child rages outside the silent space that it encloses. Constantly talked about, he or she never deigns to utter a sound. "The Losing of the Child" is particularly spatially aware. Within their narrative context, the "about" and "without" of the two central lines: "All was strife at home about him,/ Nothing could be done without him," must be understood to mean "concerning" and "in the absence of"; but both can also mean "surrounding" (10–11). Reading these two lines with this in mind draws attention to the child as the impenetrable and soundless space at the center of the lyric, which, although it cannot be entered into, works as an ordering and controlling force, setting the boundaries

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for the chaotic social world that surrounds it: "Then we brought him home again, / Peace and order come again, / The river sought his bound again"(18–19). It is this silence that Tennyson cannot countenance and which he therefore seeks to break by silencing the lyric as a whole, in order that he can then speak over it. His success is somewhat double-edged because by silencing the lyric Tennyson turns it into a totalized version of itself: it is now completely unavailable, and yet retains all its influence over the poetry that surrounds it.

The replacement of "The Losing of the Child" with "As through the land at eve we went" offers a child's grave as blunt conclusion to the revision narrative of loss:

As through the land at eve we went,
And plucked at ripened ears,
We fell out, my wife and I,
O we fell out I know not why,
And kissed again with tears.
And blessings on the falling out
That all the more endears,
When we fall out with those we love
And kiss again with tears!
For when we came where lies the child
We lost in other years,
There above the little grave,
O there above the little grave,
We kissed again with tears.
(1ˆ2. 1–14)

This, it seems to me, is a lyricized version of the myth that Tennyson constructs in the letter to his publisher, decades after the publication of "The Princess." Here, as in "The Losing of the Child," the child is privileged as heroic in its ability to order and unite. The uproar caused by the event of the child's disappearance is echoed in the argument between husband and wife; the "peace and order" achieved by his being found is repeated and amplified by the refrain of the poem, "and kissed again with tears." It is the reunion between husband and wife, however, that becomes the poem's lyric theme, lyric in that the falling out and back in again are so conflated that the progress from one to the next is transformed into a single moment. The parents can be understood as successfully usurping their child, claiming its lyricism as a solution to adult gender relations (the resolution of an argument between a man and woman) in the same way that Tennyson makes childhood available as part of the gender debate in "The Princess." This act of usurpation is dramatized by the lyric through the active memory of the dead child, traced in the presence of its grave on the evening walk of husband and wife. By referring to the child as having been "lost in other years," Tennyson provides a textual trace of the lyric he is replacing, conjoining its fate with the fate of the child of the published verse and, just as his letter to Dawson did, making of it a half-forgotten memory which can then be reconfigured and assimilated into the adult world.

This reversal of the evolutionary process that makes parents into the children of their children is the solution to the threat of the child that is adopted throughout "The Princess." The poem, and subsequently its critics, seeks to make children of its adults. In one of the strangest pieces of argument in the poem, Ida favors academic achievement over child-bearing: "Yet will we say for children, would they grew/ Like field-flowers everywhere!

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We like them well:/ But children die" (3. 234–36). Her meaning must be that children, being human, must be mortal. But the way in which she chooses to express herself suggests infant mortality; her words carry the rather chilling implication that dying is somehow the preserve of childhood. In the following discussion between Prince and Princess about evolution: "She gazed a while and said, / 'As these rude bones are to us are we to her / That will be'"(3. 278–79). The potent image of Ida's descendants walking forward over her bones, is strangely disempowered by the preceding image of the dead children that seem to be the cost of her own achievement.

The lyrics that were included in the 1850 publication of "The Princess" provide just such an image for Tennyson's career. They are memorial traces of Tennyson's professional infancy from which he has progressed. The Victorian nursery that he builds up around them is therefore a space in which he houses *himself*, assimilating *himself* into the profession of nineteenth century poet and narrating the progress of his career. To do this successfully, however, requires a commitment to Ida's misguided conviction that "children die." In the end, Tennyson cannot quite commit himself to that notion and so the lyrics that break up the narrative progress of "The Princess" remain, with the anachronistic futurity of the children that are no longer their explicit theme.

Tennyson's letter to his publisher in which he partially reinstates the child at the center of "The Princess" was written when the poet was 73 years old. Professionally successful, domestically settled, and a grandfather himself, he no longer needed to worry about growing up and was able to acknowledge a professional memory no longer made fraught by its proximity. Tennyson's memory is flawed. So subject is he to the Victorian nursery that has schooled his development that he can only repeat the lost lyric in a language informed by that development. As we read "The Princess" today, attempt to puzzle out its ideology and to house it within the gender debate, we sense that we have been similarly schooled: we cannot countenance a poem unless it can be allied with, or at least explained by, our grown up concerns. But when a poem proves as troublesome as this, perhaps we need to listen out for the incomprehensible cry of the child that fathered it.

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NOTES

1. Other articles that support Hall's argument include Eagleton and Herbert.
2. See also Draper and Buchanan for other arguments in support of Tennyson's subversive gender politics.
3. Frank and Dillon provide an interesting analysis of Psyche as both mother and child. Albright's chapter on "The Princess" also reads the child as a feminized figure. Other articles that address the importance of the child in "The Princess" include Johnston and Knoepflemacher.
4. The *OED Online* dates "nursery chair" as first used in 1869 and "nursery book" in 1818.
5. See Killham for a detailed contextual study of the poem. Part II of Chapter IX: "The Suppression of Poetic Ambition" deals specifically with the poem in terms of Tennyson's career.
6. See also Erickson.

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