ROMANTICISM, MATERNITY, AND THE BODY POLITIC

JULIE KIPP

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

published by the press syndicate of the university of cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge cb2 1rp, United Kingdom

cambridge university press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, cb2 2ru, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, ny 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, vic 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt *System* LaTeX 2$_\varepsilon$ [tb]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

isbn 0 521 81455 3 hardback

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Revolutions in mothering: theory and practice

When Catherine gave the piercing cry,
That did her child-birth pangs proclaim,
Each portrait seem'd to vivify,
Amazement shook each frame!
Behold how each right reverend sire
Seem'd struck as with Promethean fire.
Mrs. Hale, "To Mrs. Moore, On the Birth of the First Child Ever Born in Lambeth Palace October 13, 1786"[1]

Over a decade before the publication of *Emile* (1762), a text which played a foundational role in late-eighteenth-century debates about child care practices and spurred a "fundamental transformation in the attitude of parents to children," Jean-Jacques Rousseau deposited each of his five children by Thérèse Levasseur in a foundling's home, apparently against their mother's wishes.[2] At the heart of the critical debate surrounding Rousseau's actions (the details of which have been rehearsed elsewhere[3]) lie questions regarding his ensuing constructions of motherhood in texts like *Emile*. As numerous critics have noted, Rousseau became the "most pervasive spokesman" of the late eighteenth century for "natural" maternity,[4] a role for which he was certainly strangely fitted, given his persistent disdain, suspicion, and even horror of the maternal body. "[F]or my own part," he urged in *Emile* (in what sounds like a justification for his earlier actions), "I think it is better that the child should suck the breast of a healthy nurse rather than of a petted mother, if he has any further evil to fear from her who has given him birth" (14). While he mistrusted the "petted mother" who nursed her own child, he nonetheless stressed that a woman "who nurses another's child in place of her own is a bad mother; how can she be a good nurse? She may become one in time, use will overcome nature, but the child may perish a hundred times before his nurse has developed a mother's affection for him" (14).

Rousseau's deeply ambivalent attitude about mothering practices and especially about maternal bodies – his paradoxical idealization and suspicion of female nature – was not atypical, but rather reflects the deeply divided attitudes of many of his enlightened contemporaries and Romantic heirs. For Rousseau, motherhood was a decidedly duplicitous vocation: at once a manifestation of universal and of localized drives, a *locus* of (to invoke Julia Kristeva's distinction) powers of love and powers of horror. In this chapter, I trace the development of anxieties such as these to widespread public debates of the second half of the eighteenth century concerning women's physical relationships with and responsibilities to their children. Rousseau played a pivotal role in these discussions, not only because he helped widely publicize them in texts like *Emile*, but because he harnessed so successfully the weight of medical authority to his political platform. More so than any philosopher or political theorist of his era, Rousseau tapped into the medical advancements of the day, drawing on and helping to disseminate rapidly transforming ideas about motherhood, maternal bodies, and the health and well-being of children as a means to promote a very specific political agenda. His influence was far-reaching; perhaps no writer of the period had such an immediate and direct impact on popular attitudes concerning the organization of social spaces and the relationship between the public and private spheres of activity.[5] Yet Rousseau's conflicted attitude toward mothers and motherhood reveals a paradoxical double thrust characteristic of Enlightenment arguments about the nature of women's nature: for him, maternal bodies both served as evidence of women's foundational role in society *and* testified to the need to control their access to and participation in the public sphere. He simultaneously idealized the mother, as the vehicle through which nature manifests its most fundamental laws, and shrunk from her, sought to contain her, feared her incontestable access to and influence over the future citizen.

As numerous critics have noted, the widespread interrogation of mothering practices had been well underway long before the publication of *Emile*. Distinctions between "savage" and enlightened mothers were familiar to a variety of eighteenth-century discourses and were common rhetorical devices in travel literatures of the early century as well as in novels.[6] But late-eighteenth century ambivalence about the maternal body took on decidedly new inflections. Writers in Rousseau's wake expressed as much a deep fascination with the impenetrable mystery of the maternal body as a desire to restrict its influence. In its capacity, most particularly, to be "more" than singular, to be both self and Other at once, the maternal body seemed to render concrete the abstract ideal of sympathetic interconnection

between subjects nevertheless separate. Yet, while the union of the bodies of mother and child signified for many the transcendence of difference, so, too, the mother–child bond became a *locus* of fears regarding the potential for difference to contaminate, consume, or control the "self."

These anxieties held particular resonance for the Romantics, as heirs of the eighteenth-century British imperial project and as witnesses to the erosion of stable class differences in the wake of the French Revolution. One of the primary assumptions of this study is that the institutionalization of gender differences during the late eighteenth century – especially in so far as this was organized around the reproductive bodies of women – constituted a compensation of sorts for such growing cultural instability and worked to deflect growing concerns about dangerous forms of racial and class proximity. The reproductive body served numerous writers as a legible text, in other words, onto which feminine attributes could be grafted and rendered normative across geographic and class boundaries.[7] Nevertheless, as Carol Mossman notes, the maximizing of gender difference in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries via appeals to the natural order of things carried with it "the paradoxical result of rendering 'the grossness of bodies' – certain bodies – too visible for comfort."[8] While breastfeeding consequently was promoted as the most natural of duties associated with motherhood, certainly all women were not considered equal in their qualifications to perform this duty. Rousseau thus urged in *Emile*, for example, that a child's (invariably) lower-class nurse "must be healthy alike in disposition and body. The violence of the passions as well as the humors may spoil her milk" (28). The class assumptions inherent in such distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable maternal bodies clearly betray deep rifts in the logic of Enlightenment writers like Rousseau, whose argument for maternal breastfeeding is grounded simultaneously in utilitarian reasoning which stresses the natural benefits of this practice *and* on the assumption that any given mother's capacity to perform this function was highly relative. If female nature was innate for Rousseau, mothers were by no means interchangeable.

Implicit in Rousseau's preoccupation with the physical processes associated with motherhood are underlying assumptions concerning the means of promoting, more generally, the health and well-being of the nation. Even while consigning women to hearth and home and severely qualifying their influence in the public realm, he consistently identified the work of mothers with the inherently political process of socializing future French citizens. "Bad" mothers consequently figured centrally in his arguments concerning the potential degeneration of not only the moral but also the

physical constitution of France. To no small extent, Rousseau wanted to usurp the domestic authority of those mothers he simultaneously idealized, largely via a platform grounded in the surveillance and regulation of feminized, domestic spaces.[9] This monitoring of the private sphere, however, always served for him a public function: "Would you restore all men to their primal duties, *begin with the mothers*; the results will surprise you!" he urged in *Emile*:

> Every evil follows in the train of this first sin; the whole moral order is disturbed, nature is quenched in every breast . . . But when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state; this first step by itself will restore mutual affection . . . *When women become good mothers*, men will be good husbands and fathers. (14–15, emphasis mine)

For Rousseau, the maternal body constituted a site where public and private interests seemingly collapsed into one another. Women's "labor" in this scheme becomes an expression of both private desire and of public utility. Thus, while the Rousseauian mother in one sense was "successfully removed from the social sphere,"[10] she was also assigned an implicitly political role – the production of the French citizen. Rousseau represents the state's developing interest in the child as identical to the mother's own interests: not only does the home become a center for the cultivation of natural affections, the mother–child bond provides a model for the relationship between any legitimate governing body and its citizenry. (As Mary Jacobus has demonstrated, representations of France as a breastfeeding mother subsequently would play a central role in the ideological apparatus of the Republic in the wake of the French Revolution.)[11]

This type of idealization of motherhood, with its attendant emphasis on a separate, feminine, domestic sphere of influence, of course worked to disguise the fact that the social contract here endorsed actually "repose[d] silently" on divesting woman of other kinds of cultural/political authority.[12] If the "real nurse is the mother," Rousseau also insisted that "the real teacher is the father. Let them agree in the ordering of their duties as well as in their method, let the child pass from one to the other" (*Emile* 18). Though assigned a foundational material role in their children's development, ultimately women are held to be intellectually and morally unequipped to prepare those children to assume their places in society (and unequipped, too, to fully enter the public world themselves). Women's political rights within this scheme could only be filtered – so to speak – through the children they produced. A mother is too much for Rousseau a creature of the

body, desire, emotion. She is therefore likely to spoil her child, to teach the child "things which are of no use to him," to stifle the child's nature with "the passions [she has] implanted in him" (18). Because the overly fond mother represents to him as much of a threat as does the unhealthy nurse, Rousseau frequently warns mothers against their tendencies to love to excess, as well as providing extensive advice to women in *Emile* on the physical care and handling of their children, including suggestions on bathing habits and on teething and weaning practices, as well as strictures on diet (for *both* child and nurse) and recommendations against infant swaddling (25–47). Insisting that motherhood was the most natural of vocations for a woman, he paradoxically offered his female readers a very specific program of instruction on how to develop their maternal instincts by engaging in material practices associated with middle-class ideals – like breastfeeding – urging them simultaneously to curb those instincts lest they interfere with maternal duties.

It is important to recognize the weight of philosophical as well as medical authority which informed these conflicting recommendations, and the various political ends such advice would serve. Indeed, Rousseau's arguments about regulating maternal bodies reflect broader eighteenth-century philosophical and medical debates that testify to a growing interest in the depths and surfaces of the maternal body as well as to deepening concerns about channeling potentially subversive maternal energies. Utilizing radically different narrative strategies as a means to authorize different readings of maternal experience, writers of the period working within a variety of genres shared a common assumption: the maternal body constitutes a legible text onto which general theories of human nature and social relations might be grafted. Medical writers tended to focus on the unstable physiologies of mothers in an effort to establish their professional authority. Social and political theorists, in turn, drew on these accounts of potentially problematic maternal bodies, appealing to the sublime dimensions of motherhood as a means to variously promote or critique the bonds linking individuals and nations and attempting to decipher the mysterious threads that connected mothers and children in ways that often defied reason. The "case" of the mother was widely debated throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, though writers' accounts of maternal experience generally supported one of two verdicts (both of which are clearly evident in Rousseau's representations of motherhood gone wrong): mothers were held to be either naturally bad, in so far as their bodies were represented as potentially pathological, conduits of infectious diseases or unwholesome character traits; or dangerously good, given that their innately sympathetic

natures often overruled their abilities to think and act autonomously and govern their children reasonably.

Motherhood proved a concept which lent itself especially well to philosophical debates concerning the nature of sympathy – that ability to imagine oneself in the place of another so highly valued by writers of the day – as pregnancy and breastfeeding were considered to be occasions which clearly manifested a breakdown of the boundaries between the self and another, essentially the prerequisite for a sympathetic disposition. Lauding the naturally sympathetic dispositions of women as an intrinsic component of their destined roles as mothers, numerous writers of the period referenced the connection between mother and child as a means to substantiate the claim that moral sentiments were grounded in natural laws. Yet Enlightenment-period representations of maternal subjects often read like passages from Gothic novels, in so far as mother love in these accounts frequently leads to various forms of self-annihilation. Consider the following excerpt from Nougaret's *Anecdotes of the Reign of Louis the XVIth, the Present King of France* (translated into English in 1787):

> [As it] has been often said that many mothers have not that maternal affection for their children which their infant state requires, it may be, therefore, not improper to produce an instance of maternal tenderness, which, in the end, proved fatal to the affectionate parent. A poor woman, of the village of Conriet, the tender mother of five children, finding her house on fire, begged her husband to save three from the ravaging flames, and she would exert all her power in securing the other two: She succeeded with the first, and hearing the cries of the last unfortunate little sufferer, she rushed amidst the flames, hoping to secure the infant, but, in the attempt, perished herself. Let not those mothers who have not felt that maternal affection which influenced this poor woman to rescue her children from the devouring flames, say that they would not follow her example; if they do, the answer is simply this, she acted according to the dictates of nature, and though she herself should fall a sacrifice, she felt pleasure in it, as it was in the preservation of her infants.[13]

Mothers in Nougaret's scheme are not just called upon to throw themselves into the heart of the "flames," they are supposed to enjoy doing so. Not only does maternal affection necessarily belie a willingness for self-sacrifice, in other words, it inspires its happy embrace.

Many Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period thinkers appealed in this way to women's self-sacrificial natures as a means to argue that human sympathies served as an antidote to self-love, and sought to reclaim maternal sympathy as a quality compatible with manliness, duty, and empire. To no small extent, aesthetic concerns inflected many writers' accounts of mother–child bonds, given that political theorists of the period were striving

to construct a picture of civil society characterized by an harmonious relationship between the individual and the larger social group. Although newly emerging bourgeois capitalist discourses in Western Europe (and the liberal humanist philosophy which underscored them) promoted and helped naturalize the concept of the self-determining, autonomous subject, many philosophers and social theorists found it hard to square this understanding of personal freedom with their broader claims for an individual's social connectedness. Put simply, at issue is the question of how to strike a balance between individual liberty and social necessity, or harmonize the personal with the general good. The eighteenth-century philosophical commitment to various forms of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism facilitated many writers' impulses to mediate between the duties, responsibilities, and rights of the one and the many. Julia Kristeva stresses that "[t]he notion of *separation* combined with *union* was to clarify such a practical cosmopolitanism that nature foresees and men carry out."[14] Because the maternal body seemingly represented a form of union that nonetheless allows for separateness, mother–child bonds were frequently referenced as the natural underpinnings of a civil society or even a global Republic characterized by this sense of coordinated diversity. Eighteenth-century political theorists working within the Scottish Enlightenment tradition, for example, thus frequently attempted to lay claim to an aestheticized connection between disparate individuals nevertheless "linked to each other in their very flesh,"[15] representing civil society as a sphere in which the individual is nevertheless naturally bound to others, who should be treated benevolently in the best interests of everyone. For writers like Francis Hutcheson, this "law" governing interpersonal relations was irreducible to a set of abstract theoretical principles (as per Kant's categorical imperative), but was rather scripted in nature's (fundamentally utilitarian) mechanisms.[16]

Hutcheson, an Ulsterman who was educated and subsequently taught in Glasgow (1729–46) and who heavily impacted the emerging Scottish Enlightenment school, supported the benevolence hypothesis explicitly through reference to its conformity to aesthetic dictates.[17] For Hutcheson, we respond to the stimulus of the beautiful deed just as to that of the beautiful object, approving actions and social structures in which there is "some Tendency to the greater natural Good of others," as these confirm an harmonious balance between the individual and the species as a whole.[18] While maintaining that behavioral standards are by no means uniform across nations and cultures, Hutcheson appeals repeatedly to the concept of "uniformity amidst variety" as a way to account for correspondences among "the vast Diversity of moral Principles, in various Nations and Ages" (204).

He refers, for example, to the "natural Affection" parents exhibit toward their children, "notwithstanding all the toil [involved] in educating their young" (206). While such behavior is anterior, he maintains, to any external laws which might operate in the service of the weak, Hutcheson holds that this is not determined by some kind of instinct, but by a common, and inherently reasonable predilection toward the public good (204–5). Even when "other Motives" seem to "overpower Benevolence in its strongest Ties" (that is, the ties of the flesh), as in "certain Countries" where "strange Crueltys [are] practis'd toward the Aged, or Children," we can conceive that such behavior takes some "Appearance" of utility on the local level,

> such as to secure [one's children or parents] from Insults of Enemys, to avoid the Infirmities of Age, which perhaps appear greater Evils than Death, or to free the vigorous and useful Citizens from the Charge of maintaining them, or the Trouble of Attendance upon them . . . We know well that an Appearance of publick Good was the Ground of Laws equally barbarous, enacted by Lycurgus and Solon, of killing the Deform'd or Weak, to prevent a burdensome Croud of useless Citizens. (205–6)

This apparent justification for euthanasia and infanticide is perfectly compatible with Hutcheson's benevolence theory, which is in the end consistent with nature's way. Thus, although Hutcheson finds the methods of Lycurgus and Solon "barbarous," in so far as these were designed with consideration for the "publick good" they confirm the benevolence model just as much as does the behavior, for example, of the loving parent.

Hutcheson makes no distinction here between the duties of mothers and those of fathers, as parental feeling within his scheme is not necessarily gendered. His social model would be increasingly embodied over the course of the eighteenth century, however, in ways which both intensified his aesthetics of harmony and problematized the role of the maternal body in concretely manifesting such an aesthetic ideal. Roy Porter and Leslie Hall stress that one of the chief goals of Enlightenment writers was, to this end, to "set conduct upon a sounder footing, [by] developing a sexual psychology grounded in a proper science of human nature."[19] Thus philosophers in Hutcheson's wake, like David Hume, were far more explicit about the aesthetic implications of sexual organization, and more attuned to the ways in which particular forms of sensibility appeared to be marked by the flesh.[20]

In an appendix to his *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) entitled "Of Self-Love," Hume defends Hutcheson's doctrine of utilitarian benevolence against the appositional claim that behind every seemingly

disinterested action or impulse lies (at least the trace of) self-interest. While he allows that benevolent intentions can be colored by self-love, he insists that the benevolence "hypothesis" is "more conformable" than ego-centered theories of the subject "to the analogy of nature."[21] The analogy Hume provides is of the "fond mother":

> Tenderness to their offspring, in all sensible beings, is commonly able alone to counterbalance the strongest motives of self-love, and has no manner of dependence on that affection. What interest can a fond mother have in view who loses her health by assiduous attendance on her sick child, and afterwards languishes and dies of grief when freed, by its death, from the slavery of that attendance? (*Principles of Morals* 117)

Hume accentuates the total abandonment of self-interest of the "sensible" mother, her complete surrender of ego. She becomes a powerful exemplar of disinterested benevolence – not unlike the example Hume gives us of his own widowed mother, "a woman of singular merit, who, though young and handsome, devoted herself *entirely* to the rearing and educating of her children" ("My Own Life," in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 3, emphasis mine). The sympathetic mother serves Hume in this way as a natural testament to the utilitarian logic of the disinterested benevolence theory. Upon her "assiduous attendance," he implies, rests the well-being of the child and, more broadly, of the entire species.

Yet, in so far as her love is realized explicitly as self-sacrifice, Hume's "fond mother" serves, too, as a concrete example of the physical "self"-denial which the benevolence theory may entail. Far from remaining aloof from the implications of his idealized representation of maternity, Hume foregrounds the gritty materiality of this mother's response to her child. The mother loses first her health, and then her life, through an attendance which is compared to slavery. While Hume thus invokes this image of selflessness so as to confirm the existence of actions which are void of self-interest, he also paints a portrait of maternal sympathy which is nothing short of Gothic. If, as a *locus* of sympathy, Hume's idealized mother represents the beautiful because harmonious relationship between the self and another, in so far as her love is infused with fear and characterized by extraordinary suffering she is thoroughly sublime.

Adam Smith, following Hume, would continue to foreground the self-sacrificial nature of women's sympathetic responses to their children, opening his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) with a reflection on the nature of sympathy, and arguing that, regardless of an individual's tendency toward selfishness, "there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest

him in the fortune of others."[22] Among other examples Smith offers, like Hume, that of the loving mother:

> What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moanings of her infant that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of what it suffers, she joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. The infant, however, feels only the uneasiness of the present instant, which can never be great. With regard to the future, it is perfectly secure, and in its thoughtlessness and want of foresight, possesses an antidote against fear and anxiety, the great tormentors of the human breast, from which reason and philosophy will, in vain, attempt to defend it, when it grows up to be a man. (12)

As with Hume, we find here a portrait of maternity which is characterized by the experience of suffering. Smith's reading of maternal experience accentuates the "terror" and "sorrow" of the loving mother, whose sympathetic response to her child (even if the product of imaginative experience rather than pure "instinct") is described as a form of torment far worse than the ravages of physical disease. Smith explains that sympathy is not actually a physically conditioned response to the pain or pleasure of another (which we can never experience), but an imagined conception of "what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (9). He stresses however, with an image that evokes the condition of pregnancy, that when we place ourselves in the situation of another, "we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him" (9). Only when his agonies "are thus brought *home* to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them *our own*," can they begin to affect us (emphasis mine, 9).

Smith prioritizes in this way local affections over abstract moral dictates, arguing that sympathy is born of a thirst for likeness, an impulse to harmonize difference. Yet the "terror," "sorrow," "misery and distress" which characterize this sense of personal interconnectedness, from the point of view of the mother, again recall the sublimity that marks and even defines maternal love as a condition equated with all-but Gothic suffering. In both Smith's and Hume's accounts of idealized mothers, sympathy poses a dangerous threat to autonomy – to the "fond mother's" very survival (just as for the "poor woman" of Conreit, who dies trying to save their children from the "ravaging flames").[23] Responsibility to "others" obviously carries a painful price in this scheme, but one held to be of paramount importance to harmonious civil relations for both Smith and Hume. Hume thus frightfully describes, by way of contrast, a vision of society wherein benevolence and social harmony have given way to chaotic and dangerous self-interest,

suggestively offering us another explicitly maternalized example, that of a "blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 211).

Hume points here to the "monstrous" side of the same maternal body that he champions elsewhere as a manifestation of nature's benevolent utility.[24] His image of nature as indiscriminately productive of "maimed and abortive children" in fact anticipates the way in which early Enlightenment attitudes regarding the "usefulness" of reproductive labor would begin to shift in light of the population explosion in England and its neighboring territories during the eighteenth century. Later economists like Smith and (more notably) Thomas Malthus, would stress that the value of any given woman's capacity to produce children was highly variable, and that over-reproduction might be another form of excessive consumption – a conspicuous drain on the shared resources of the community.[25] Irish mothers were frequently subject to such charges, especially after the turn of the nineteenth century (a point to which I will return in chapter 3). But closely related to these concerns about overpopulation is the suggestion that the value of a mother's love was also variable in relation to the interests of the many: an alternative conception of motherhood, associated with female volatility, a lack of discernment or prudence, hovers ominously alongside Hume's benevolent self-sacrificing maternal ideal.

We should be attentive to the ways in which this highly ambivalent deployment of maternal metaphors feeds the underlying civil politics of Hume's and Smith's arguments. For each, the mother–child bond becomes a model for aestheticized human relations, one which, we might suggest, refigures an idealized Union of Scotland and England – as discrete bodies nevertheless made "one." (Such a two-in-one model indeed had long marked the Scottish Highland–Lowland division, which may have set something of a precedent.[26]) Colin Kidd points out that, after the Act of Union of 1707, the long-historied dispute over Scotland's independence from England was transformed rather than settled: "Scots needed more than ever to convince their fellow Britons that the Union had been a treaty between two sovereign equals, and not the reabsorption within an English pan-Britannic imperium of a wayward vassal nation" (133). It was imperative for both Hume and Smith that the political domain be conceived not as a homogeneous entity, in other words, but as a "union of singularities," which "cannot necessarily be harmonized," to borrow Kristeva's terms.[27] What is at issue for writers of the Scottish Enlightenment school, to put this another way, is the acknowledgment of "variety" within the broader

context of uniformity, as Hutcheson would maintain. The priorities of local affections and ties must necessarily be sustained in this scheme within a broader community figured not so much as a univocal totality but in terms of coordinated diversity. Thus even supportive Unionists naturally remain bound to their distinct motherland. "[N]ature has implanted in everyone a superior affection to his own country," Hume notes in "Of National Characteristics," and to be so impregnated with national feeling is more consistent with nature's way than holding "loose indeterminate views to the good of the species" (225). Moreover, the self-sacrificial behavior of the benevolent mothers described by Hume and Smith serves to emphasize particularly the *material* dimensions that underwrite such a Union – the immediate, tangible responsibilities of Great Britain to her fledgling Scottish subjects, as it were, who must be nurtured and physically cared for, even to the point of suffering material losses. If Union between England and Scotland is on the one hand highly desirable within the Enlightenment progress-oriented scheme, in other words, it cannot be so in an atmosphere devoid of sympathy, whereby the interests of the nation take precedence over the rights of its individual members.

It is important to remember that both Hume and Smith were working within a framework whereby the Union of England and Scotland had not necessarily brought about unity. A more maternalized model of intercultural relationship, based on mutual affection and responsibility, might certainly seem preferable within this context to the use of force and the kind of oppressive legislation that antedated the 1745 rebellion in Scotland.[28] Yet, as Terry Eagleton notes, "To root government in human affections is in one sense to lend it an alarmingly fragile foundation."[29] This maternalized model of civil relations is recognizably unstable because potentially "self"-destructive. Sacrificing all to the interests of some, in the vein of those mothers who die out of love for their children, inevitably might prove as problematic as strict utilitarian disinterestedness. Hume and Smith therefore each want to stress that a sense of cultivated prudence rather than mere instinct must inflect the bonds that link individuals in a community, although, for both, the ordering of social systems based on the principle of pure disinterestedness needs to be tempered by the natural, if sometimes seemingly irrational, sacrifices of self evidenced by sympathetic mothers.[30]

Edmund Burke's representations of civic relations would be inflected in similar ways, which not only underscore how "[the British] constitution preserves an unity in so great a diversity of its parts," but stresses that the advantages "obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims, are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement."[31] When he turns to his native Ireland,

however, Burke paints a picture of an harmonious society which depends upon the maintenance of local, explicitly feminized affections of the sort *not* evidenced in England's punitive treatment of Irish Catholics. In his *Tracts Relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland* (1765), Burke reveals where his own sympathies lie, stressing that our "feeling for those who have grown up by our sides . . . the benefits of whose care and labours we have partaken from our birth" are more natural than the kind of disinterested benevolence that Burke would later associate with Rousseau's vision of society (*Works* IV:27).[32] Burke's famous attack on Rousseau in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) in fact targets specifically Rousseau's lack of maternal instinct – his abandonment of his children to the hospital of foundlings. "[I]n these gentlemen," Burke notes of such agents of the revolutionary spirit of the day, "there is nothing of the tender parental solicitude which fears to cut up the infant for the sake of the experiment" (*Reflections* 181–82). For Burke, such a corruption of natural affection results in bigotry and oppression: "I do not know whether benevolence so displaced is not almost the same thing as destroyed" (*Tracts Relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland, Works* IV:27).

Burke's *Reflections* nevertheless offers a staunch defense of Britain's *manliness* over and against the instability of the effeminate French ("All your sophisters cannot produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course that we have pursued" [*Reflections* 47]), yet, as Seamus Deane notes, Burke's distinction between femininity and effeminacy helps explain this apparent shift in gender references. Feminine sensibility is, for Burke, a virtue that is often compatible with manliness, sublimity, and England's "frame of polity," which Burke describes as "the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections" (*Reflections* 46). French effeminacy, however, bears no resemblance to such a framework. Burke explicitly aligns qualities he associates with sublimity in *On the Sublime and Beautiful* – "admiration, reverence, and respect" (49) – with British national character and sets these dispositions in opposition to those effeminate qualities that he aligns with the fashionable tastes, gross appetites, and animal-like ferocity of the French.[33] Moreover the former sublime dispositions are attributes associated with the responsible mother (they "*nurse* manly sentiments"); the latter alternatively reflect a "barbarous philosophy" which speaks to a reproductivity of a different order (as "the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings" [*Reflections* 213–14]). France has "abandoned her interest, that she might prostitute her virtue"; the "mixed mob" consists

not only of "ferocious men" but of "women lost to shame, who, according to their insolent fancies, direct, control, applaud, explode [the Assembly]" (*Reflections* 49–50, 81).

Consider, by way of contrast, the famous apotheosis of Marie Antoinette, in which Burke describes this classic "mother on trial" as both an emblem of matronly sensibility, and as a thoroughly sublime Gothic heroine (she is described as a being "made for suffering," as bearing "the weight of her accumulated wrongs," and as carrying a "sharp antidote against disgrace [i.e. a vial of poison] concealed in [her] bosom"). The Queen has comported herself during her period of captivity with all the "dignity of a Roman matron." She is deserving of "veneration," as well as "respectful love"; her treatment "in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honor and of cavaliers," constitutes a tragedy of sublime proportions. But the spectators of this tragedy have not demonstrated the proper aesthetic response:

> [T]he age of chivalry is gone. – That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, *the nurse of manly sentiment* and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness. (*Reflections* 88–89, emphasis mine)

The problem with the revolutionary spirit of the day, according to Burke, is precisely that it breeds barbarism rather than a sublime interest in the plight of others; it renders mothers, even queens, mere animals, and animals "not of the highest order" (*Reflections* 90). This leveling effect is evidenced for Burke in the unrestrained hysteria of the overtly feminized mob which leads the captured royals into Paris amidst "shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (*Reflections* 85). If, on the one hand, Burke wants to elevate the maternal sufferings of the Queen while maintaining that feminine sympathies serve as the foundation for harmonious civic relations, the threat of female instability – of a reproductivity of another kind – clearly lurks closely beneath the surface of the *Reflections*.

What I wish to underscore here is the decided ambivalence that marks these various writers' preoccupations with the realm of natural affections, maternalized sentiment, and the female body more generally. Moral

sentiments rooted in physical bodies prove, in the end, highly dangerous for many writers of the period because bodies conform to dictates which were widely held to be naturally injudicious. Indeed, Scottish Enlightenment theorists were not dissimilar from their German counterparts in betraying these anxieties. Immanuel Kant's writings, for example, evidence even deeper concerns about the realm of feminine affections than those which are apparent in the Scottish Enlightenment camp – especially in so far as these pose a threat to absolute duty. Kant's deep mistrust of feminine sympathy, in fact, strongly resembles Rousseau's; for each sympathy poses a threat to the universal ideals dictated by reason as the necessary ends of individual freedom. For each, consequently, the concept of "woman" becomes synonymous with localized interests and desires that must be subordinated to the interests of the many – and thus with a version of benevolence which is anything but disinterested or rational. If, within the British theoretical tradition, maternal sympathy would become a tenuous sign of uniform relations between diverse bodies nevertheless linked by their common "Britishness," for Kant, the maternal body betrays the overtly threatening aspects of allowing natural sympathies to serve as a model for the body politic.

Yet Kant represents women's reproductive bodies, on the surface, quite benignly, celebrating the way sexual difference operates as a sign of the aestheticized operations of nature: "Why was it necessary for such a pair [man and woman] to exist? The answer is: In this pair we have what first forms an *organizing* whole, though not an organized whole in a single body."[34] Kant is clear on how women function within this system. It is "with a view toward the propagation of their species" that nature has so organized the sexes (*Critique of Judgment* 187). As for Hume, women's reproductive labor makes manifest for Kant the harmony implicit in nature's organizational scheme. That scheme, however, also confirms for Kant a fundamental difference between the sexes: just as "among the masculine qualities the sublime clearly stands out as the criterion of his kind," so, too, "all the other merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful" (*Observations* 77, 76). He explicitly links female beauty, moreover, to woman's "many sympathetic sensations, good heartedness, and compassion": "Sublime attributes stimulate esteem," he explains, "but beautiful ones, love" (*Observations* 77, 51). Woman's "philosophy," he stresses, is "not to reason, but to sense" (*Observations* 79). Although he suspects that "the fair sex" is incapable of "principles" (which he admits are rare, too, in most men), Kant concedes that "in place of it Providence has put in their breast kind and benevolent sensations, a fine feeling for propriety, and a complaisant soul" (*Observations* 81). If women are capable of benevolent

actions, this is due to the fact that they respond not to "universal rules," but rather to "the conduct they see about them" (*Observations* 80). Women respond feelingly to that which they can immediately see and touch, Kant insists, while men are more naturally inclined to make moral choices based on disinterested, reasonable principles.

Feminine sympathies, because instinctual, thus confirm for Kant our "natural" reciprocal connection to others in the world, yet, because women's abilities to experience sympathetic feelings for others are not born of rational thought processes, they are associated with a lack of "self"-control. Women, Kant claims, are intolerant of the concepts of "duty . . . compulsion . . . obligation," therefore one "should not at all demand [of them] sacrifices and generous self-restraint" (*Observations* 81). This distinction helps explain Kant's particular discomfort with his own construction of "feminized" sympathy. Sympathetic identification with another, he claims, is:

> beautiful and amiable; for it shows a charitable interest in the lot of other men, to which principles of virtue always lead. But this good-natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind. For suppose that this feeling stirs you to help a needy person with your expenditure. But you are indebted to another, and doing this makes it impossible for you to fulfill the stern duty of justice . . . On the other hand, when universal affection toward the human species has become a principle within you to which you always subordinate your actions, then love toward the needy one still remains, but now, from a higher standpoint, it has been placed in its true relation to your total duty. (*Observations* 58)

This is a standard argument directed toward the dangers of excess "giving," but one which reveals, within the context of Kant's distinction between the dispositions of the sexes, a central paradox of female "nature." For, if sympathy leads to actions that are "dutiful and amiable," these nevertheless have "no true moral worth" (*Grounding* 11). With its strong associations of bodiliness, immediacy, and lack of "self"-control, feminized sympathy threatens to upset the interests of the many in favor of those of the few. A certain amount of distance from the other seems as necessary to Kant as it is inevitable, lest duty be forgotten in the swell of "fondness for every interest" or "sadness at every stranger's need" (*Observations* 58). Hence, while women are more naturally inclined to sense and respond to the suffering of others, this capability becomes a detriment when it detracts from the "rule" of justice and slips into complaisance, "an inclination to be agreeable to others by friendliness, by consent to their demands, and by conformity of our conduct with their intentions" (*Observations* 58–59). When the "motive of the mind does not rest upon a universal principle," he notes, "it easily takes on changed forms according to whether the objects offer one or the other aspect" (*Observations* 63).

So, defining the mutable, inconsistent nature of woman becomes a means for Kant to argue *against* local or privatized sympathies, in favor of a more disinterested "Principle of Coexistence, according to the Law of Reciprocity or Community" (*Critique of Pure Reason* 166). Because women follow the dictates of the heart, they respond to laws which, for Kant, are "merely private," and which therefore do not meet the conditions necessary for a truly reciprocal "international" or "public" law (*Perpetual Peace* 51). "[A]ll politics," he argues in *Perpetual Peace*, has for its juridical basis the establishment of "harmony to its greatest possible extent." Kant maintains, to this end, that as a "science of right," political duties must be distinguished from sophistic maxims which reduce all duties "to mere benevolence" (52). He offers an example which is evocative of pregnancy but which, in fact, figuratively reverses the birth process – that of the small state being "swallowed up in order that a much larger one may thereby approach more nearly to an alleged good for the world as a whole" (52).

Kant's "feminizing" of localized or private sympathies, Terry Eagleton suggests, can be seen as an attempt to deal with the problem of political absolutism in eighteenth-century Germany, a territory divided into feudal states, "marked by a particularism and idiosyncrasy consequent on its lack of a general culture." State controls on industry and trade, guild-dominated towns, poor systems of communication, and the bourgeoisie's lack of access to ready capital all testified to the potential problems in maintaining exclusively localized interests.[35] Kant's work is not so much an endorsement of absolutist authority as it is an exposure of the disadvantageous effects of prioritizing local interests over more universal structures of authority. To put this another way, localized sympathies function for Kant like conditional rather than categorical imperatives: "[S]uch laws as are whispered to [us] by an implanted sense or by who know what tutelary nature" may provide a pillow upon which "human reason in its weariness is glad to rest," but this is a "sweet illusion," whereby "there is substituted for morality some bastard patched up from limbs of quite varied ancestry and looking like anything one wants to see in it" (*Grounding* 34).

Kant's suggestion that feminized sympathies produce bastard children echoes in many respects the ambivalence associated with maternity and with the realm of feminine affections so apparent in the work of Scottish and Irish authors. Yet, whereas Hume, Smith, and Burke focused particularly on the self-sacrificing aspects of feminine sympathy as a means to acknowledge the natural primacy of those localized interests which for Kant were so problematic, Kant himself emphasized the dangerous components of sympathy as part of a plea for a cohesive (masculinized) German culture. In either context, feminine experience is marked and, in fact, *defined* by a

sense of doubleness or self-division which might be read from either side of this ideological divide, given the social, political, and economic interests which philosophers and social theorists were attempting to negotiate.

It is worth emphasizing again the ways in which the maternal body so often identified as the source of women's sympathetic instincts garnered increasing attention in late eighteenth-century British and German medical and educational discourses alike. Much like their British counterparts, German educators and moralists strongly advocated, for example, the cause of early maternal breastfeeding. By 1794, however, with the publication of the Prussian Legal Code, this advocacy would become a mandate of the German state. Healthy women were required to breastfeed under the Code, which also assigned to fathers the responsibility for determining when a child should be weaned. In contrast to practices in England, furthermore, wet nurses were licensed in late-eighteenth-century Prussia.[36] The state's assumption of this type of jurisdiction over maternal bodies, as Ann Taylor Allen recently notes, contrasted strikingly with German moralists' and educators' prevalent representations of motherhood as an "ineluctable instinct."[37] Institutional forms of control within the German-speaking world in fact reinforced assumptions that motherhood was more duty than instinct, more a responsibility than a right.[38] Indeed, German mothers who breastfed their own children against their own inclinations conformed more directly to those dictates established by Kant as indicators of true morality. Because considered an absolute duty, rather than a pleasure or an otherwise self-interested means to an end, legislated maternal breastfeeding might indeed prove, according to Kantian metaphysics, a means for women to demonstrate rational moral principles.

Advocates for early maternal breastfeeding in Britain tended to take a different tack. While the German emphasis on legislated maternity privileged more explicitly women's public duty to society, British medical writers, in the same vein as theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment school, tended to sentimentalize the private experiences of mothers and to advocate the highly self-interested, and ultimately utilitarian benefits of early maternal breastfeeding. Nevertheless, the kinds of anxieties relating to the physiological dimensions of maternity evident in philosophers' accounts of maternal experience tended to be mapped out even more graphically in medical literatures of the period and in literary texts that drew on and helped promote various physicians' "cases." If philosophers tended to tell tales of problematically sympathetic mothers, physicians of the period tended to pathologize those maternal bodies widely held to be the source of women's sympathetic natures, emphasizing the dangers inherent in the physical ties

binding mothers and children. Debates over the pros and cons of early maternal breastfeeding reveal strikingly not only ways in which science underwrote arguments concerning the nature of maternal nature, but the ways in which the maternal body proved to be a highly troublesome source of authority for writers bent on celebrating the unique bond between mother and child.

As I have already indicated (and as numerous recent critics have noted), attitudes about early maternal breastfeeding were shifting dramatically in England by the mid-eighteenth century.[39] Physicians were beginning to take note of the benefits of the colostrum produced by the breasts in the early weeks after the delivery of a child and consequently to promote "new milk," while successful experiments in putting children early to their mother's breasts conducted in the newly established lying-in hospitals in London and Dublin during the 1740s and 50s were widely publicized in medical literatures of the period. Physicians used the available data not only to attack the practice of hand-feeding infants, but to indict upper-class women who traditionally engaged wet nurses. Dr. William Cadogan, who played a central role in the establishment of the London Foundling Hospital and was a vocal advocate of early maternal breastfeeding, pointed to the Bills of Mortality for evidence of maternal negligence among women who chose not to nurse their children, arguing that children under the age of five accounted for half the death toll. No one, he lamented, attends to these numbers, "notwithstanding the maxim in everyone's mouth that a multitude of inhabitants is the greatest strength and support of a commonwealth."[40]

The benefits of breastfeeding for mothers likewise emerged at this time as a major focal point in this discussion, a probable consequence of the changing readership of medical-advice texts. As Valerie Fildes notes: "After 1750, writers of popular medical books addressed themselves directly to mothers, whereas before 1750 they had addressed themselves largely to midwives, nurses, or to no-one in particular."[41] Most late-eighteenth-century physicians argued that putting the child to the mother's breast within twenty-four hours radically reduced instances of "milk fever" (an infection caused by plugged milk ducts), which often proved fatal.[42] Dr. William Smellie, for example, in his 1752 *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*, noted: "Women of an healthy constitution, who suckle their own children, have good nipples, and whose milk comes freely, are seldom or never subject to this disorder; which is more incident in those who do not give suck."[43] Dr. Hugh Downman, in his three-book poem *Infancy* (1774–76), alternatively paints a vivid picture of the disastrous effects of breastmilk "confin'd or driven / Back on the Blood":

> The raging Fever, from the fatal Cause
> Holding its Name, Obstructions fierce, dire Pangs
> Of torture, future Cancers by the Juice
> Of bloated Hemlock not to be remov'd.
> (Book I, lines 94–99)

Downman goes on to urge mothers considering employing a wet nurse not to "give to an Alien's care / Thy orphan Babe," for such a choice betrays that:

> The Form of Woman's thine, but not the Heart;
> Drest in Hypocrisy, and studied Guile
> This Act detects thee, shews thee to have lost
> Each tender Feeling, every gentle Grace,
> And Virtue more humane . . .
> . . . to have unsex'd thy Mind, become
> The Seat of torpid dull Stupidity.
> (lines 106–7, 116–20, 123–24)[44]

Yet women (especially upper-class women) had previously faced considerable pressure to engage wet nurses rather than nurse children themselves.[45] Fildes stresses that well into the eighteenth century "great strength of purpose was needed by upper-class women whom were determined to go against the cultural norm."[46] This alone may have inhibited the production of a good supply of milk for some, a condition of which many aristocratic women of the period complained – and for which they were much ridiculed. Inverted nipples (and other complications) resulting from the practice of wearing tightly-laced corsets were also a problem for many,[47] and fears about scarred breasts caused by nursing plagued others.[48] The long-standing taboo against sexual intercourse during the period of lactation, moreover, caused many husbands to forbid their wives to breastfeed. (Mary Wollstonecraft famously takes issue with such husbands in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.) The infertility caused by the suppression of ovulation in the nursing mother further worked against the desires of many upper-class women to produce numerous children. Breastfeeding was commonly acknowledged to be a somewhat effective method of birth control, as Downman's poem, for example, attests:

> She who refuses to her Young Ones Lisp
> her Swelling Bosom, each returning Year
> Conceives, and each returning Year sustains
> The pangs of Childbirth. Harnass'd by Fatigue
> The strongest Constitution fails.
> (Book I, lines 189–93).