

NEVER LOST, NEVER FOUND:
A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHILD IN LITERATURE

RACHEL BROPHY

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Abstract

This study is an inquiry into the emotional significance of representations of the child and begins from the assumption that the relationship between our perception of the child and the adult we have become, is filled with anxiety. The initial questions ask how a study of representations of the child offers something beyond our own experiences and observations of real children. This work draws upon psychoanalytic theories of constructions, childhood, and the problem of loss, along with Arendt's concept of natality in order to initiate exploration within the complicated world of adult/child relations. Literature, the primary content for this investigation, welcomes us into an imaginary constellation of experiences where the problems of natality, loss and the construct of the child are uniquely explored. The emotional scenes of childhood and loss examined in the novels *Annie John*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Frankenstein* reflect the adult's disoriented relationship with the past and the interminable problem of the relations between adult and child. Four central themes emerge from the conversation with the selected literary texts: 1) newness, fragility & the body; 2) dimensions of time; 3) the emotional relationship between the adult and 'the child'; 4) knowing/not-knowing. These themes are used as starting points for analysis, recognizing the child as representative of something but also in need of representation. This project aims to reveal the forgotten emotional life existing between adult and child and assist in reconceptualizing a relationship to childhood that considers a re-imagined notion of natality along with the capacity of phantasy and our imaginative thinking.

Dedication

For the many early childhood education students who have challenged me with difficult questions and inspired me with their imaginative ideas.
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Chapter One: Reading and the Interminable Child

This dissertation is an inquiry into representations of the child and opens with questions of how adults imagine childhood. I begin from the assumption that the relationship between our perception of childhood and the adult that we have become is filled with angst. I ask how a study of representations of the child offers something beyond our own experiences and observations of real children. This project is also an experiment in auto ethnography of reading and an experiment in theorizing with select psychoanalytic concepts, the tensions between adults and children. Thus, while there is a large and engaging literature on the figure of the child in literary criticism, social thought, and the field of psychoanalysis and education, my study, as experienced from the view of an early childhood educator and teacher of pre-service educators, focuses on three exemplary novels that I see as figuring the adult/child encounter.

In my work as an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) and teacher of ECEs I have experienced tensions around the idea of the image of the child. How one imagines childhood is often presented as a choice we make; determining the kind of educator we become. It is assumed that the image of the child we possess holds significance for the quality of our practice and interactions. The way we develop curriculum, discuss pedagogy, govern programs and determine what is important in early childhood education is attached to our image of the child. To frame our image of the child as a choice is limiting and ignores the emotional and psychic life of the adult. My questions begin with how we might move away from thinking about the image of the child as the ECEs' philosophical choice, but rather recognize there is an emotional entanglement in the way we look at and construct our ideas about children.

Childhood places “constraints on the imagination” (Steedman, 1994, p. 138) due to our emotional history of being a baby, the extinction of childhood omnipotence, and the existence of

actual children. This in turn forecloses possibilities for critically or imaginatively thinking about our representations of children. If our imaginative capacity is limited by our own lost experience it will influence how we represent and understand childhood. My inquiry asks how images of the child founded in growing up affect the adult's encounter with understanding childhood. This raises the possibility of thinking about childhood as an adult experience or idea—one of looking back, and inseparable from the adult's past time as a child. In this formulation, we meet a different kind of child and a different kind of adult and uncover the many barriers to this type of imagining. And so, I begin by thinking about representations.

I started to think deeply about representations of the child when I was reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a graduate school course. Initially, I looked to see what kind of child is present in the novel, how the child is represented, and what the child seemed to represent. At the same time as I read *Frankenstein* I was exploring psychoanalytic theory through Sigmund Freud's (1937) "Constructions in Analysis". At this point, I began to think about constructions and their ability to act as containers that hold disparate pieces together, as something more than a narrative, as something that interprets what cannot be told and gives history meaning. While building my relationship with psychoanalytic thinking as a method for analysis, I was also greatly influenced by Hannah Arendt's ideas of natality, newness, and responsibility. There seems to be something so strange and estranging about encountering newness that provokes concern, obligation, and aversion, while our own childhood remains inaccessible and disguised by screen memories. The child, a new creature and reflection of our loss, is a container of memories and experiences that cannot be known but somehow presents us with the belief in a second chance. My work is also impacted by Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope* (2006), which is filled with questions about how we make meaning out of something that no longer exists. I was compelled

to use Lear's ideas of unintelligibility, loss, and enigmatic objects to think about the passing of childhood and what this means for the adult. The enigmatic object—a bridge between what was lost and the re-discovery of significance—was, in relation to my particular problem, the same thing that had been lost. I was perplexed for the reason that when childhood is no longer, it is the child (an enigmatic child) that helps us connect to and perhaps overcome its own absence.

Representations become a necessary and a wonderful tool for exposing these problems as they provide us distance from the emotions of daily encounters and felt experiences with real children and allow space to think about the child differently. Through my graduate school relationship with *Frankenstein*, I became aware of how representations come alive in literature, a space of possibility, where the challenges in our relationship with the child feel the least resistance from the troubles of everyday life. And while a representation is a reflection of our emotions and relationships to the past, it is free from the constraints of real time, expected outcomes, and limits on its shape, form, or meaning; it is open to interpretation and re-formulation. This study of representations of the child undeniably leads to questions about the adult, and the potential space of narrative and reading suggest the possibility of imagining children, and ourselves, otherwise.

Early Childhood Education and the Problem of the Image of the Child

When I began my doctoral work I was interested in developing a project that provided a critical discourse analysis of commonly used early childhood textbooks in order to explore the language of early childhood education. I believed that books like Carol Gestwicki's seminal early childhood text *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* limit the thinking of early childhood educators by keeping them bound to the role of unquestioning and unimaginative caretakers of children. Many North American early childhood educators actively look to the work from

Reggio Emilia in Italy for inspiration. Ideas from this approach are adopted and present a dramatic contrast to the theme based and traditional school-readiness focused childcare programs in North America. As I closely studied the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education my questions and concerns about the lack of imagination in early childhood spaces were intensified. I became increasingly curious about our fixation with Reggio and most particularly our desire to invest in a similarly uncritical image of the child as the framework for a new Reggio inspired philosophy. The image of the child that emerges from the union (of Reggio ideas along with a mainstream North American philosophy) is that of a child who is “competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential” (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6). To me there is much missing from this construction but there is also much revealed.

Representations of the Child

Who is this mythic child that we used to be, want to know, and should be working with? I see perceptions of childhood as suffering from what Freire (2005) calls “narration sickness” (p.71) due to a lack of inspiration, loss of innovative thinking, and a concentration on binaries in order to define what is normal and true. There must be other ways to understand childhood and the initial questions that emerge from the challenge of imagining new narratives of childhood include: How much do our own biographies influence our ideas of children and why are we so strictly bound to them? Is there a place for imagination in the process of conceptualizing childhood or has the image of childhood become non-negotiable? What counts as childhood and why do we cling to a mythic image of the child?

The image of the child and constructs of childhood are embedded in our everyday thinking and interactions. Childhood is most often associated with innocence, vulnerability, and a primitive nature, all in contrast to our representations of adults. Any non-normative behaviour is

othered and in need of intervention. These traditional notions of childhood are brought to life in literature, for example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where childhood is conceptualized within a dichotomous relation to adulthood through a variety of childhood stories including those of Victor Frankenstein and his monster. Through Shelley's narration of these childhoods a mythic child is reinforced; one that stands for all others. This particular image of the child reinforces determinism, which supports the idea that moments from our childhood can govern our future obsessions. An authentic childhood is presented or understood as a time of innocence, ultimate happiness, and bliss. The construction of an authentic childhood is found in opposition to the idea of a monster who heightens our fear of the unknown through their ugliness, unfamiliarity and unpredictability. The monstrous child appears in contrast to the child who ECEs create, promote, accept and understand.

Developmentally appropriate practice and child-centered pedagogy, which are overflowing with uncritically accepted ontological claims about children, also nurture the image of an authentic child. Child-centered pedagogy promises children's subjectivity and, in a general sense, is guided by the aim to develop the "whole child" by nurturing individual abilities, capacities, and intelligence. Child-centeredness removes the active adult and asks that children work together, find solutions, and be active explorers. Play is one of the key elements in the accepted version of childhood. If we agree that play is children's work and children learn through play, then play-based curriculum is clearly the best option for their development. This means that there is not only an authentic childhood but also an authentic response to childhood in early childhood spaces. Repetition of this thinking in educational programs reinforces these ideas, and so in many ways they have become truth.

Reconceptualizing and Resistance

I recognize that normative narratives of childhood have been questioned in recent years by reconceptualists (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Langford, 2010; McNaughton, 2005; O’Loughlin, 2010) as criticisms of developmentalism, a universal childhood, play-based learning, and child-centered pedagogy have surfaced in the wake of post-structural and post-colonial thought. While some critics such as Cannella and Viruru (2004), Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (1999), Yelland (2011) and Langford (2010) thrive in the name of reconceptualization many of these same critiques focus on power and politics rather than emotion and imagination and so continue to feed the idea of an authentic childhood as they look for a right way, a better way, or a best way to view and to educate the child and then do the work of early childhood education.

Walkerdine (1993) claims we have bought into a fantasy. She places “developmental psychology in terms of what postmodernists have called ‘grand metanarratives of science,’ large universal stories whose central character is ‘the child’ and in which key aspects of the plot involve development, reasoning, cognition and so forth” (p. 452). She argues that development is intended towards a goal of reactional abstract thought and not everyone can reach it. Cannella and Viruru (2004) question the universality of the childhood experience and take issue with children being used as political tools when they have a lack of political power. Their argument objects to identifying a group as “children” because it conceals the historical, political, and social realities of its members. Cannella and Viruru (2004) also suggest that childhood may not even be a “real” category. Even earlier, Arendt (1958a) presents criticisms of child-centered pedagogy, declaring that “under the pretext of respecting the child’s independence, he is debarred from the world of grown-ups and artificially kept in his own, so far as that can be called a world” (p. 180). This segregation ruptures the natural relations between children and adults and the loss of the

instructional relationship between them is significant. Creating a world just for children is a form of ghettoization which can enforce a gap between adults and children, making understanding between both groups more challenging. The most pressing concerns from reconceptualists exist in the assumptions about play and the focus on reason, where children are destined to move toward logical, rational, and analytic thought in the name of civilization. These critics highlight how this thinking supports and builds otherness, which I relate to monstrosity. Walkerdine (1993) argues that change is necessary and calls for the production of new narratives that tell of transformation and acknowledge the extent of the power belonging to the current childhood myth.

There are clearly limits to constructions that require faith in determinism and an orientation towards the goal of reason, but there are also limits within these well-constructed critiques. While dissecting and rejecting the universal child there is an automatic investment in another universal. In the midst of these critiques there is still a commitment to the authenticity of childhood and a challenge to find alternatives. The child of mainstream early childhood education, even in the wake of new approaches, individualized learning plans, play based curriculum, and child and family centred teaching, still remains one thing. These accepted images of children, whether as romantic idealizations or politicized subjects, promote dualisms and have little flexibility. There is no space for what is difficult or monstrous, and if this kind of child appears they are instantly othered and in need of adaptation, fixing or exclusion.

Problematic, Conceptual Framework and Method

In this project I theorize that our loss of childhood is significant. This loss holds traumas that we carry through our adult lives. Working with very young children triggers a deep emotional connection to our own childhood experience – one that we cannot name and find

difficult to articulate. The central questions that drive this project are: what motivates the adult's need to construct and reconstruct the child? And how does this reflect the anxieties and wishes of the one who has left childhood behind? My dissertation explores how representations slip into the world of real children, animating the adult's need to control, protect, and defend while enacting limits on understanding the child's otherness. To articulate the essence of something appears to require a construction and so the enigma of childhood cannot be expressed without a vessel capable to hold the affect of its mystery. What are the limits of our current representations and where is the space for imaginative ideas to emerge?

The two focal points of this study are (a) to ask, "What are the limits of normative notions of childhood?" and "Can literature teach us about those limits?" and (b) to consider the problem of representing the child in light of our loss of natality and consider how this might impact our thinking as early childhood educators. I speculate that in this emotional conflict we may be able to access and then overcome our trauma by making use of our imagination. It is the child's capacity or concepts we associate with childhood (imaginative thinking, imagination, phantasy) that enable us to manage the devastating loss of our childhood and its impact on our thinking, our relationships and our psyche. A significant piece of my inquiry is to see if we might learn to employ the traditional resources we associate with childhood (play, imagination, natality of the mind) in order to undergo profound transformation and adaptation in the face of our loss. From this work a conceptualization of the problem of representing the past, childhood, and children in light of our experience with natality, emerges. Perhaps our instances of phantasy; ones that allow for radical difference are easily tolerated in literary contexts and through the act of reading. However, our own phantasies of natality might not only mobilize the need for the adult to

manage and defend the child, but more interestingly, might also motivate adults to set such imperatives aside.

Imagination

In early childhood education, imagination belongs to the child. Educators can be creative, innovative, and responsive but imagination has its place in children's play, their inventiveness, their creative problem solving, and their unique ways of forming and using language. I hold the position that the imagination of the early childhood educator also matters, but I believe it is restricted. The field of early childhood is most often concrete; focused on observable action and evidence-based practice. Everything is explained through careful observation. The image of the child in early childhood education has little room for strangeness or monstrosity. If so, it is modified or else othered and removed. This makes symbolic thinking a challenge as we are pressured to always live in the real world as we work with actual children. And so, while the emergence of a monstrous child may first appear as surprising in my writing, it is deeply related to the boundaries that regulate the imaginative capacity of the ECE.

Jonathon Lear's book *Radical Hope* (2006) significantly altered my thinking. While Lear's work presents an ethical inquiry into coping with cultural change, devastation and transformation for the Crow people, it is also a story of the power of imagination as restorative and courageous. In *Radical Hope*, Lear describes imagination as a kind of psychological flexibility (p. 124). In this study imagination refers to the aesthetic of childhood, the space of play and potential, creative thinking and action, and the capacity to develop alternatives and not worry about right answers. Imagination is the ability to think of things that are not real or do not exist. Imagination is also the ability to form a picture in the mind of things not yet seen or experienced and the ability to think of new ideas. Imagination is possibility. Throughout my

project there is a heavy emphasis on imagination as something limited by “narration sickness” (Freire, 2005, p. 71) and by the memories educators construct about childhood. However, imagination is also something limited by the child.

Nativity

Hannah Arendt’s concept of natality opened an inventive way to conceptualize the problem of the image of the child. I originally framed my encounter with Arendt as happening upon her ideas. I now know this doesn’t acknowledge how deeply pieces of Arendt’s writing challenge my thinking and inform my analysis. I utilize Arendt’s concept of natality, as a foundational starting point and her ideas about thinking help initiate and extend my exploration within the complicated world of adult/child relations. Intrigued by the crisis that natality brings forth in both the child and the adult, I explore how and why we forget this crisis when we think about the experience of childhood and our ideas of the child. Throughout this dissertation natality provides a way to think about our encounters with the child but also our encounters with newness and imagination and the possibilities these concepts offer our thinking.

For Arendt (1971), thinking is the human condition. As the work of inter-subjectivity, thinking has to occur in public with the other and meaning comes from contemplation expressed through narrative. This relationality is already in question when entering the world of adult/child relationships. The problem of thinking, revealed in Arendt’s work, is the problem of distinctions. Without distinctions, understanding turns into compliance, agreement, or authority. A lack of distinctions breaks meaning apart and concepts become muddled. Arendt (1958b) stresses that we must talk about things in terms of their distinctions rather than collapse them with their close associates. This dilemma belongs to the problem of childhood as well where the mythology and the actual child often grow into the same thing. When distinctions collapse, people mistake

representations of reality for reality itself. In this context, the inability to make distinctions may be a symptom of *infantile amnesia* (Freud, 1905), the repression of the first few years of life. This forgetting however, is not due to the inability of the child to record and remember but instead is related to the repression, which I assert drives the search for an irretrievable past.

Arendt (1958a) discusses children as outsiders invading the world; their encounters with adults provoke complications. She contends that natality represents a beginning and a strangeness. I believe that part of this difficulty may be because adult natality has long since disappeared. Arendt speaks of how the world wears out and the new are required to secure our second chance. Children's natality reminds us of the one that was lost, and arouses the difficulties we have in tolerating the transitory nature of the human. To contemplate natality as an assault on the child (an alien facing the onslaught of the unknown), and the subsequent loss of natality as a common trauma of history for the adult, the inability to remember childhood becomes more than just case of forgetting and biological maturation. The experience of losing natality unearths a significant misplaced emotional relationship to childhood. This conceptualization demands an acknowledgement of time, age, and experience and highlights the problem of inter-subjectivity between adults and children.

What Arendt sees as the difference between adults and children is made clear and again reveals her ideas about the challenge and necessity of making distinctions. Relationships between the adult and the child are partially founded in the obligation to transmit knowledge of the past into the future (from parent to child, teacher to student), implying a sense of duty on the part of the adult. The idea of natality stresses the adult's responsibility to introduce the child unfamiliar to the social world to a dynamic and changing environment. But with this role comes a glaring reminder of the adult's own loss, one that requires the creation of the adult's new responsibility.

Rose (1984) insists that “childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated and which is never left behind” (p. 12), and this helps situate the adult’s sense of obligation to transmit their history onto the new as somehow connected to their own loss. Childhood will persist as long as the young enter the world and, following this, adults will continue to be faced with the past they cannot remember. Natality becomes a useful starting point for investigating the loss associated with childhood and how it fuels representations of this potentially enigmatic creature.

Theoretical Considerations of Childhood and Psychoanalytic Theory

Some key elements of psychoanalytic theory (such as constructions, screen memories, melancholia, phantasy building) are particularly useful in my analysis and support thinking about childhood in a way that progresses beyond a desire for helping or understanding real children and into an exploration of the emotional significance of the concept of childhood itself.

Psychoanalytic theory also provides a vocabulary that is descriptive, emotional, and sometimes volatile, and its narratives offer us space to play with thinking, asking us to use our imagination and be flexible.

Constructions. I draw upon psychoanalytic views of constructions as a way to rethink representations of childhood. A construction is a general term for the process of forming a fabrication or the art of building a composition. It can also be thought of as a way to put together the parts of something to create a structure, an arrangement or a whole picture. To think about constructions through a psychoanalytic perspective creates a new layer of complexity and provokes a variety of questions. What are the parts that are being put together? Where do they come from and how are they gathered? What is the composition and how will it be put to use?

Freud's (1937) concept of constructions is essential for moving through my work. He describes a forgotten prehistory: a time before we can remember. The task of reconstruction is to symbolize these memory traces in order to make meaning of what stood there before. Freud compares the work of constructions in analysis to an archaeologist's excavation in the way that traces of history are contained in the fragments of debris. In both, there is "an undisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains" (Freud, 1937, p. 276). He notes where the two processes diverge, pointing out that in every human subject (but very rarely in archaeology) "all of the essentials are preserved, even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject" (p. 276). Construction is a method of attempting to rebuild and make sense of the past with these fragments of feelings, which do not hold a place in time and struggle to be articulated. This piecing together gives shape to memory traces in order to ignite a usage, a working through, or an understanding needed for narrative. The invitation to use that is created in the process of construction opens up a space where feelings are given both language and form; where meaning can be made. Essentially, construction provides a way to express elements of emotional life that were lost, put aside, or hidden away. These nameless experiences of childhood, whether phantasy or reality, become flexible when re-created through the process of construction and allow us to put elements of phantasy into time where they can become material for analysis or discussion.

Childhood itself is a construction, a pieced together fragmentation of misplaced memories. Childhood's meaning is absent during its time and the search for this in the present is what drives the adult's obsession with the child, which becomes a search for the self and for interiority. The emotional scenes of childhood and loss explored in novels reflect the adult's

disoriented relationship with her or his own past. Through construction, the figure of the child occupies the multiple spaces of adult/child, self /other, and past, present and future. Examining constructions of childhood reveals the interminable problem of the relationship between the adult and the child. This problem can be conceived concretely, found in the interactions between adults and children, and belongs to the real world. However, when we turn to the unconscious the conflict shifts. Here it becomes a question of forgotten emotional relationships partnered by the anxieties of self/other questions. Regardless of where it is found, the mythology of childhood is constructed and reconstructed with the passage of time.

Truths, screens, and absences. Described by Freud (1937) as *fragments of historic truths* the content of a construction is neither authentic nor false. The past is always remembered through the perspective of the present and memories become significant even though they are re-creations and not actual past events. Screen memories appear to be a way to compensate for absent or insufficient memory but may in turn stimulate recollection.

Britzman's (2004) description of constructions based on Freud's early work draws attention to the *significance of absence*. She writes:

the construction of memories must no longer be thought of as representations of what actually happened. Rather, constructions are the work of sorting out the distortions and analyzing what the early Freud (1899) called 'screen memories,' or vivid details of insignificant content, a placeholder for the forgotten. (p. 253)

Britzman (2006) also explains how the meaning and understanding of this conflict of knowing/not knowing are absent at the time of experience and how in this mistimed relationship, meaning making is deferred to the future and later created through the process of construction, which is partnered by a variety of distortions. This is what Britzman and Pitt (2004) call a

mistiming of learning. The *screen memory* (Freud, 1899) holds a place in the mind for disguised traces of the past to be contained. The conflicts from early experiences become active in the present and current preoccupations leak into the narratives of childhood. In the opposite way, wishes from history are transferred onto the present and narrated as truth. All of this is projected onto a future. The estrangement from our own natality or our *infantile amnesia* produces what Freud (1914a) calls “a compulsion to repeat” (p. 394). The impossibility of remembering what happened when we were young drives us not only to search for the memory but also to believe we can retrieve the child. This repetition is used as a way of remembering. Striving to capture an impossibility creates anxiety that sends us on quest to find something we do not know we are looking for and may not even want.

For Freud (1937) pieces of historical truth can become free from their distortions and their present-day attachments through the process of analysis and then they are able to be put back to the point in the past where they belong. A construction, however, also has the ability to live on as delusion when it places the recollection on a disconnected and unrelated object. Delusions and anxieties are bound to nameless events of the past and reveal themselves in the present as broken parts. It is here that *screen memories* while a gesture towards something can also act as a defense. Constructions can be used as a method of preservation; a way to hold something still and stop it from changing. Ultimately a construction is ambiguous and the way it becomes meaningful is utterly dependent on the subject who informs its use.

The problem of loss and the world of phantasy. A phantasy in a psychoanalytic sense is an anxious wish or fear created by our imaginary thinking. Phantasy is also the pieces of our imagination that are developed prelinguistically. The infant of psychoanalysis is constructed as polymorphously perverse, subject to the other, filled with desire, and under imminent threat. This

child is formulated through loss. In the work of Klein and Riviere (1964), the emotional circumstance of the infant is considered to be of enormous consequence and is essentially dependent on the relationship between the mother and baby and having a lifelong impact on the internal workings of the mind and the emotional life of the human. Klein and Riviere make links between love, loss, and absence. Developed in intimacy with destruction, relationships grow out of a desire for love and a wish to destroy the other. In this constellation, and in its own defense, Klein presents us with a monstrous representation of the child; however, the child may become a kind of “monster” within their own phantasy. While, Arendt compares being new in the world to the experience of assault, the baby in psychoanalytic theory experiences an immediate loss comparable to death that serves as the foundation for all future love and relationships (Klein & Riviere, 1964). In addition to this, natality is temporary and childhood must be surrendered.

The split from the mother creates an absence and this loss requires a method of defense and a time to mourn. Kristeva (1987) discusses how this process ignites the imagination and serves as its fuel as well as its tormenter. This corresponds with Klein’s description of the development of phantasy. In the struggle between love and hate (between gratification and its lack) the infant’s impulses and feelings are partnered with what Klein (1964) calls “phantasy building, or more colloquially imaginative thinking” (p. 60), a primitive mental activity, according to Klein, that is the beginning of imagination. In these infantile phantasies, the baby imagines the source of gratification to be present even when it is not in order to obtain pleasure from it. Conversely, in frustration with the mother’s absence and in response to an unmet need, the baby will mount a phantasy attack on its own source of security (i.e., the breast, the mother). Kristeva (1987) explains how once the infant knows the mother is finally separate she is motivated to try and regain her through creative thinking and eventually through speech. It is

paradoxical that language—the expression of our thinking but also a replacement for the absent mother (the lost object)—is the tool used in attempts to explore and reclaim childhood.

Language—an aesthetic experience that stands in for the lost object—offers its own sense of gratification but is still not directly reflective of our loss. It is both a satisfying yet frustrating substitute.

A Turn to Literature

To think about language launches us into the world of literature. My own questions about childhood and the imagination of the ECE are revealed through my process of reading novels and then pressed further by the application of a psychoanalytic lens.

Writers of literature create spaces of possibilities and language and find ways to articulate the essence of an encounter; they welcome us into an imaginary constellation of experiences where the problems of natality, loss, and the construct of the child can be uniquely explored. Literature also offers representations of the child that move beyond both personal experience and observations of real children, representations that survive beyond the reading or writing of the story. For these reasons, literature becomes the primary content for this investigation or the tool to investigate the problem. The complexities of self/other relationships and the affect of forgotten histories become thinkable in the world of a novel through the process of construction.

Initially, I use literature as an instrument to investigate the problems of my dissertation. At the beginning of my work, I position the use of literature in opposition to real children. On reflection, this can be read as a defensive construction that alludes to literature as able to provide a different kind of truth or access to the notion of an authentic childhood; one of the very things I am attempting to critique. Perhaps it is a defensive construction as it grows out of my angst about the work ECEs do with actual children; concerns about the real child do raise anxieties that

need a new home. Eventually, I recognize that literature offers something beyond a space to execute method or act as object for analysis, but instead presents a possibility in thinking and an opportunity for emotional experience in terms of the educator's imagination.

I am stimulated by my curiosities about the capacity of the ECE to access and play with their own imaginative ideas about childhood. To work with actual children and comfort their cries, answer their whys, be questioned, resisted and loved, to play and paint and wonder alongside children makes reading children in symbolic ways difficult. The ECE, influenced by and reminded of her own constructed childhood with each daily interaction, requires space to phantasize. What might literature offer to the dilemmas of adult/child forgetting, anxiety and deferred action? What do fictions offer our thinking? What do fictions offer early childhood educators?

Literature has an ability to dwell in incomplete stories or dream narratives. Britzman (2006) discusses the "aesthetic conflict" of the literary and frames it as the existence of both knowing and not knowing in the same space. She explains how these affective states make literature unable to be in charge of itself while at the same time asking us to think about things in a revolutionary way. In literature, affect and knowledge seem to exist in very close proximity, making it difficult to distinguish between truth and reality. Literature invites playful questions and curiosity, and this somehow makes it easier to think about difficult ideas, moving us away from the idea of an authentic childhood and our image of the child as a choice.

Regardless of any relation to true life, the novel is an imaginary representation that draws us into a collection of experiences often represented by the figure of the child. It is a place that has the potential to tolerate nonsense, the collapse of meaning, over-distinction, and timelessness in a similar way to the world of phantasy. The novel, much like the unconscious, can exist

without boundaries, so things from real life can be distorted and changed (e.g., birth has options, childhood has variations). Kristeva (1987) discusses literature and literary creation as an alternate way to deal with the melancholy associated with the loss of the object. This process of negotiating melancholia is an imaginative act and can be considered an extension of the phantasy building of infancy.

Reading can transport us to a place that allows us to think about the child in imaginative ways. In her book *Literacy of the Other* (2015) Mishra Tarc explains how:

The novel becomes a holder of the writer's fraught effort to communicate meaning and the reader's labored efforts to make meaning through limited frames of reference.

Reading some books resembles our infancy when we are stuck in a fantastic dream state and made to take in the reality of (m)other on the basis of feeling. Entering the fantastic space of the novel we are also anxious to make sense of the other's communication rendered by aesthetically delivered meaning. (p. 53)

The reading of a novel can return us to a time of infancy, of newness. In this sense, the concept of natality when released from the actual child can be thought of as a quality of conceptual thinking of the child. In our reading process we awaken a relationship to natality; hence to imagination. The relational act of reading provides an experience of spending time in a place where we may encounter natality. With this in mind, I see literature as a way to communicate across dimensions of time and give space to emotional experiences that are otherwise difficult to articulate. To learn from our experience with reading is perhaps to learn to read children in symbolic ways.

Possibilities and revolt. Representations in literature provide us the ability to endure ambivalence, meaninglessness, forgotten emotions, and inhabit multiple spaces, positions and

dimensions. And while the breakdown of reality gives the opportunity for phantasy, we must remember that representations are always inadequate (i.e., not the real thing). In this study I explore how to think about literature and the experience of reading through Winnicott's *potential space* and Kristeva's *revolt*. In his theoretical framework, Winnicott (1971) provides us with the idea of "playing" an area in something he calls the *potential space*. This space is not a thing in itself but a location that has to be created over and over again. The baby's experience with omnipotence happens in this playground; it is the space between mother and baby or the place where they join together. In this space, there is opportunity for interplay between psychological life and reality. It is the space of affect and relationships and possibly the space of engagement with literature. I make use of the idea potential space to contextualize the opportunities that reading offers to the imagination. Mishra Tarc (2015) offers a way to theorize the use of literature that incorporates some Kleinian thinking that supports this idea. She describes how "When we read new content we are sustained by older, invisible experiences of how it is when we learned to read. The dreamwork quality of our experience of a novel is a hallmark of transference" (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 54). This builds on understandings of constructions and screen memories but also prompts the idea of natality as a concept or quality of childhood rather than just the state of being new. Kristeva (1996) presents *revolt* or rebirth through literary texts by suggesting that though the texts may be simple accounts or recollections, they represent "a prior future" (p. 50). This refers to a displacement or change in the past through the process of returning to it through imagination and reformulation. The potential space that tolerates symbolic breakdown and not knowing permits the recapitulation of experience. In this space, we are faced with our own natality, loss, and materiality, and attention is drawn to the fragility of the human. While

“playing,” our representations have the potential to become adequate and the actual experience may lose its significance.

Novels offer us a narrative of childhood where things that are not known can be expressed. And while literature knows something about childhood, it is important to keep in mind, as Britzman (2004) reminds us, that literature is not in control of its knowledge. The figure of the child born out of a union of history, real life experience, psychoanalytic theory, and the novel offers a compelling and bewildering image. As we leave the world of literature, we take its figuration of the child with us, and in many ways it is a summation of our regret, anxiety, and desire.

The Figure of the Child

This project follows an experience with literature as we transform the way in which we create and utilize the image of the child. The move from literature into concepts is a complicated process, where an understanding of the figure of the child becomes necessary. A figurative child is metaphorical; it moves and transforms across time, genres, forms of writing, and cultures, where it is altered according to new understandings and begins to stand in for actual children. The child encountered here is not a real child but a construction, built for a purpose and used as a device. Important to note is that the intent of this construction is most often unconscious, buried deep beneath the incomplete form of our screen memories. Figuration shares common characteristics with construction, as they both include the act of forming something into a particular shape and representing it through symbolization.

It is difficult to distinguish between historical, literary, and real children (Steedman, 1994), and as ideas collapse, images become reality. Rose (1984) suggests that this is not only “a refusal to acknowledge difficulties and contradictions in relation to childhood; it implies that we

use the image of the child to deny those same difficulties in relation to ourselves” (p. 8).

Possessed with enigmatic qualities (mystery, obscurity, contradictions) and puzzling to the observer, these child figures are both enchanting and a source of speculation. The child figure is invested with innocence of knowledge, ideas of futurity, and potential, thereby possessing a combination of childhood qualities that animate adult protection and reflect desire for the child. The child may serve our needs for working through grief and unfulfilled wishes but is still not directly reflective of our loss. Narrative, in both oral tradition and written works, reinforces the mythology of the child and keeps investment in the figure alive. And once held in time, this child becomes a container for truths and understandings. The figurative child, in many ways like a literary child, can be used to revolt against actual experience, so when reconstructing it as narrative, history becomes malleable.

The Novels

The novels discussed in the chapters of this dissertation all provide recollections of encounters with natality and my experiences with reading. In each novel the child is a character but also a figure that the narrator has created and invested in. While I can write about why I have chosen these novels, I believe in some ways they chose me. Each piece of literature I have incorporated in this dissertation holds significance not only in terms of the exploration of the problem but also in the way each piece of literature was integral in the formulation of my research questions. Each book is deeply connected to a web of formulations I made while completing this study.

In Chapter Two, I work with the novel *Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid. This book comes indirectly via my own childhood. My older sister recommended this novel to me when she learned I was curious about representations of the child in literature. My sister has always been a

motivating force and inspiration. Perhaps unknowing, she also incites my natural competitive nature and triggers my self-doubt. All of this feeling is deeply connected to our childhood relationship; much of that memory now lost and reconstructed. *Annie John* tells the story of growing up. Annie John's story is told chronologically which enables me to trace her growth, loss and the emergence of her phantasy thinking with some ease. I use this book to explore what it means to have and lose childhood, a traumatic process that never leaves us and plays out over and over again. We watch the child adapt by developing a phantasy life in order to carry on. Kincaid's novel demonstrates the use of the child's body to house problems of loss. This is also the story of the infant and the mother, as questions of language are attached to the child's body, time is layered and the mother's story is incorporated into the child's. *Annie John* is also a story of confronting newness – a new body, new thinking, new information – and is reflective of what the child does to us.

Chapter Three is organized around an exploration of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*. I originally read this text alongside my graduate student colleagues in a psychoanalytic theory class. This was the first piece of literature I investigated using psychoanalysis as method. Ishiguro's novel offers a story of childhood that is a reflection back, like many others. This novel shows how the narrator's current state influences the stories she tells about the past. Reading *Never Let Me Go* moved me to think about the idea of deferred action. Ishiguro tells us stories within stories. *Never Let Me Go* presents us a child who has no mother, not even in her imagination but the story makes the mother necessary and illustrates her as enigmatic, just like the child. This novel highlights the need for phantasy in making sense of childhood and explores the way in which we use objects to connect to, as well as avoid our loss of natality. Ishiguro's

book is an exercise in constructing and exposing the myth of childhood but also demonstrates our craving for it.

In Chapter Four, I return to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This is a novel I met at the beginning of my investigation, when I first explored representations of the child as something beyond my own experience. An iconic story, *Frankenstein* demonstrates the ways in which we construct childhood. It also unearths our image of the child and reinforces a deeply rooted belief in a 'truth' about childhood. But perhaps more importantly, I knew this story before I had ever read the book. The imaginary childhoods of *Frankenstein* live beyond the pages of the novel in our everyday images of childhood and monsters. This novel asks us to encounter newness but with a child that we think we already know.

Each of these novels is a story concerned with origin as well as a reflection back on childhood memories. Each novel constructs the child and childhood within our understanding of the mother, even if she is not present; the mother is possible, monstrous, confusing, desired, and missing. Each novel describes the story of childhood in relation to school and learning. Each novel also places value in the body of the child as a site of truth, change and confusion. Each novel moves across and between times. Each novel is a story of the need for imagination.

My process of learning to think about representations of the child and constructing childhood is deeply tied to each of these three novels. *Annie John*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Frankenstein* were all formational texts for my thinking. While these novels have enabled my own defensive constructs they also facilitated my recognition that I had defensive constructs at all. I have held onto my novels tightly as they contain my understanding of key concepts. My challenges with these concepts are also thoroughly intertwined with the texts.

Themes for Exploration

Over the course of this study I discover four themes that live within my analysis of the selected literary texts. These themes run as threads making appearances in each chapter and providing an opportunity to think about constructions of childhood in association with the problematic: a combination of my interpretation of Arendtian ideas of natality, psychoanalytic theory, the problem of loss, figures of childhood as investments of desire and a theory of literature as potential space.

The first theme *newness, fragility, and the body*, contains concepts of vulnerability, weakness, and the predisposition to be broken or make mistakes. This theme is also concerned with being strange or unfamiliar, as well as with representations of fresh beginnings, restoration, and renewal. This area considers that being new and delicate is a threat to the human because of its association with mortality. Conversely, newness is valued and desired for its vitality, innocence, and health, and being young is idealized, increasing the conditions for sentimentality. The fascination with newness draws attention to unfulfilled wishes for the past, the body, and the self. It is a reminder of the satisfaction associated with the pursuit and recovery of the lost object. Qualities of newness and fragility aid in the personification of the child figure, and these characteristics easily reshape the notion of interiority into something tangible, as something that can fit inside. This theme also contemplates the dislocation that occurs for the adult when understandings about children's bodies are questioned and distorted.

The second theme, *dimensions of time*, contemplates ideas of temporality, belonging or relating to a particular period, to be ephemeral or eternal, and existing in time. In addition, this theme explores the simultaneous existence across and within multiple times, knowing no time, and the relationship between past, present, and future. This area recognizes that the process of construction is a way to put things into time and allows time its suppleness. It also sees linear

structure having limited use when creating childhood. Endowing representations of the child with emotions, history, and meaning give them shape in time and an ability to be in multiple dimensions at once. This theme explores the wish to preserve, manipulate, and use time in order to fulfill desire and dispel anxieties. In this way, the past becomes present, future narrates past, time is fluid, and multiple times exist at once.

The emotional relationship between the adult and the child is the third theme for exploration. It is concerned with examining the presence and capacity of emotion, the roles and responsibilities of adults and children, and the expression of emotion shared between them. Adult ideas of childhood seem to be inseparable from the experience of being young. From this position of looking back, adults make claims of authority and knowledge. These ideas are often expressed through interactions with concepts of childhood and projected onto relationships with real children. This theme explores how adults have difficulty distinguishing between real children, historical children, and constructed or literary children and imagines that anxiety leads the way in the inescapable and troubled emotional relationship between adulthood and its past.

Theme four, *knowing/not knowing*, plays with ideas of obtaining and possessing knowledge, the relationship between knowing and not knowing, and is interested in the ways in which knowledge is signified and how it is transferred between adults and children. Also elemental in this area are ideas of ownership of knowledge, not knowing what you know, and being in or out of control of knowing. This theme works from the premise that there is something adults cannot know and this struggle to know is demonstrated in the belief of the possibility of recovering lost knowledge. These efforts are reflected in the desire to capture and possess the child in order to acquire mysterious and lost memories. In this area, both childhood and history are framed as ways of knowing, but an alternate knowledge is also presented. This theme

considers the child as more than symbol or representation of the past but as a figure that is invested with desire and history.

Overview of Chapters

This project stems from my own desire to question the mainstream narrative of early childhood education, specifically the image of the child. At the beginning of this project I explore representations of the child with a new found revelation that my own representations are restricted by my completed and lost childhood. Psychoanalytic theory is the main method of analysis and literature a tool to enable this exploration. The books I include in this work are deeply linked to my own representations of childhood, memories of childhood and work as an early childhood educator and graduate student. While the early childhood educator is not explicitly present in each page of this study, they sit on the sidelines waiting for imaginative openings or an invitation.

“Chapter Two: Phantasies of Natality and the Death of Childhood” explores Arendt’s idea of natality in relation to questions about our loss of childhood and how it impacts our ability to think about children. Jamaica Kincaid’s novel *Annie John* (1985) is used to think through the significance of natality not only in its consequences for adult/child relations but in how its loss informs our constructions of the child. In the novel, the hands of Annie’s mother, those that bathe, clothe, feed, and caress her, become strange and unrecognizable as they work to usher her into what the novel describes as “young lady business.” (p. 27). This guarantees a split in the mother-child relationship, which initiates the death of Annie’s childhood. In this process of growing up, we see the child develop phantasies of omnipotence and power as she wants to control, change, or hurt her mother. The mother disillusion (Winnicott, 1971) the child through insults and embarrassment, forced rights of passage, and the removal of her methods of

delivering satisfaction. The separation of mother and child is thought about in consideration of Winnicott's *transitional space* and the loss of natality. The conception of the child as "becoming" and the adult as "arrived is questioned, particularly due the destruction of the mother, and/or the symbolic way the mother and child kill each other, in order for the future to come to pass.

"Chapter Three: Motherless Babies, Melancholia, and the Search for the Lost Object" thinks about narrative and how we tell our childhood stories. This chapter also explores question of origin and the significance of the mother/child relationship in the subject's development of love, hate and imagination. This chapter makes use of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* to explore problems related to the formation of love through loss, the search for the lost object, and how loss has the capacity to become melancholic. Understanding the emotional situation of the baby (Klein & Riviere, 1964) is complicated when the baby has no beginning like the characters in *Never Let Me Go*. In the world of the novel, the child's questions of origin are diverted by the orchestration of "Collections" that serve as a means to construct history, make attachments, and essentially cover up the need to search for what was lost. However, regardless of what object was lost in infancy or how it happened, the loss is significant and remains unknown. Using the character of Kathy H., with her challenges in remembering, making relationships, and her mysterious attachment to objects, I employ Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as a way of thinking about her narrative method and defense against loss. This chapter is filled with slippages between phantasy and reality and asks questions about the accuracy of memory, recognizing the need for constructions. Kathy H. initially seems strange and estranging but eventually we realize we are more connected to her than we may want to be. In our world and inside the novel, these circumstances send us on a mission to recover something we do not know, something we cannot find, and perhaps something we do not even want.

“Chapter Four: Beautiful Monsters, Strange Children, and the Problem of Making Distinctions” extends the discussion on the difficulty adults have distinguishing between real children, historical children, and constructed or literary children. This chapter moves the conversation to a focus on figures of childhood. While our questions of childhood are often held deep within, they are brought back to the surface both consciously and unconsciously when we are exposed to particular triggers. The most pressing problems that arise from this collection of ideas are: Why would we want to push the child inside?” and “When the idea of the child is activated, yet again through our encounters with the “aesthetic conflict”, why does it resurface in a completely different form and without distinctions?” To introduce these ideas, I begin with Maurice Sendak, author of *Where the Wild Things Are*, as provocation for thinking about the figure of the child. To explore these ideas further, I create a dialogue between Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Carolyn Steedman’s *Strange Dislocations*. The narrative of Frankenstein’s monster is considered in contrast to Shelley’s ideas about childhood, hoping to animate tensions in her mythology. I also see the monster as a representation of the child, who then comes to represent childhood and exists as a figure beyond the page. Steedman’s work acts as a tool to support the complicated process of thinking about a child figure, its manifestation, and its purpose.

“Chapter Five: Courage, Imagination and the Interminable Child” provides an overview of the relationships between the chapters and returns to the novels *Annie John*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Frankenstein*, recognizing the ways in which each of these stories provoke questions of reading and imagining the child through a relationship with literature. Concepts that run through the project including: phantasies of natality, imagination, enigmatic objects, and the presence and absence of the mother are discussed to explore how they are used, made flexible and changed or

re-formulated through each chapter. The idea of courage in Lear's *Radical Hope* (2006) is transformed in a way to help understand the necessity of constructions in light of their complications and the problems that they create. Elements of the four themes: (a) *newness, fragility, and the body*; (b) *dimensions of time*; (c) *the emotional relationship between the adult and the child*; and (d) *knowing/not knowing* are explored again as evidence of imagination and the way we make space for our phantasies of natality. I recount the origin of the study as a question that emerged from my work in the field of early childhood education. I trace how the project evolves into an intensive study of the phantasies adults have about adult/child relations and becomes a study about imagination and what it might mean to awaken the imagination and phantasy world of the ECE. The discussion moves into a conversation about the pressure to provide pedagogical implications in relation to this theorizing and how instead this project may offer the field of early childhood education a new and generous curiosity towards children as real and children as phantasy objects for adults.

Chapter Two: Phantasies of Natality and the Death of Childhood

The ordinary beautiful devoted mother presents to her ordinary beautiful baby a complex object of overwhelming interest, both sensual and infra-sensual. Her outward beauty, concentrated as it must be in her breast and her face, complicated in each case by her nipples and her eyes, bombards him with an emotional experience of a passionate quality, the result of his being able to see these objects as “beautiful.” But the meaning of his mother’s behaviour, of the appearance and disappearance of the breast and of the light in her eyes, of a face over which emotions pass like the shadows of clouds over the landscape, are unknown to him. He has, after all, come into a strange country where he knows neither the language nor the customary non-verbal cues and communications. The mother is enigmatic to him; she wears the Gioconda smile most of the time, and the music of her voice keeps shifting from major to minor key. (Meltzer, 2008, p. 22)

The exchange Meltzer describes between mother and infant child is both conventional and epic and highlights not only the enigmatic qualities of the child, but also those of the mother. In sensual, emotional, yet ordinary language, Meltzer gives us an account of the baby, an alien who encounters unknown terrain, who has a sensory experience that stems from the mother’s beauty, power, and mystery, and who is shaped by the confusion of her disappearance and reappearance. This formulation sees the adult/child bond beginning with the recognition of beauty and emerging from a baby’s desire and need. This relationship quickly develops into an attachment that is conflicted and later, difficult to break.

In this chapter, representations of the relationship between the adult and the child are explored by working with an interpretation of Hannah Arendt’s (1958a) concept of natality in combination with psychoanalytic theories of childhood, love, and loss. As the child grows up and leaves childhood behind, there are a number of symbolic traumas that live on as phantasies, housed deep inside the psyche. The *phantasies of natality* discussed throughout this chapter are stimulated by Klein’s (1964) formulation and related to ideas of imagination. The distinction between *fantasy* and *phantasy* is understood most simply as the difference between fantasy as daydreams and phantasy as anxiety and imagination. Natality in this conceptualization originates from Arendt’s (1958a) ideas of newness but is

opened to make room for psychoanalytic theory. The anxiety that is entangled with our desire for love is rooted in a fear of its loss and is the impetus for our symbolization, phantasies, and neuroses. The phantasies that develop in infancy can eventually transform into imagination and other creative expressions but remain as signals and connections to many of our significant historical experiences. While these memory traces may attach themselves to create the inner emotional world of the human, they are eventually disguised by screen memories and revealed in often inexplicable ways.

The chapter begins by asking how our social imaginaries of the child founded in growing up affect the adult's encounter with natality and understanding of childhood. I ask how we can recognize the emotional entanglement of past and present phantasies in the way adults look and construct images of children and wonder why we resist thinking about our relationship to childhood in this way. Jamaica Kincaid's (1985) novel *Annie John*, a story of a young girl coming of age in Antigua, provides us with a phantasy story of the baby and the mother. Originally written as a series of short stories separately published in *The New Yorker*, each story works as a distinct and independent episode while maintaining threads of connection across the whole. I examine *Annie John* to analyze how the child and conflicts of childhood are (re)constructed and represented in the novel. These questions press upon the ways that adults project both their ideas of childhood onto children and their past experiences onto the future. Through this piece of literature I explore the development of love through loss, the way the mother must disillusion the child, the destructive phantasies the child develops toward the mother, and the relationship between language and education and our attempts at reparation. *Annie John* provides a way to think about natality, being new, and then suffering loss of the end of the childhood. The way the mother, who was initially absent in my questions of the child, reveals herself through this story is significant. The chapter concludes with speculations on the question of why literary narrative is an

ideal locus for the expression of the complex history of experiencing and losing childhood as well as the deep relational struggle between the adult and the child.

The adult/child relation persists with or without the presence of actual children, and for adults, it continues long after the symbolic death of childhood, where it turns into something I term as *phantasies of natality*, an evolution of Arendt's notion of natality informed by psychoanalytic thinking and my own investigation. This term is two-fold. Phantasies of natality are those belonging to natality, our infancy, and our pre-linguistic selves, but they also refer to the phantasies we have about natality, both children's and ours. These alluring phantasies—filled with promise, worry, and lament—inhabit our imagination, come to life in the psychical world, and reappear in the space of play offered by literature. In this configuration, I pose the possibility of childhood as an adult experience—one of looking back and inseparable from the adult's present and her/his time as a child. In this construct, childhood persists and is always present.

Birth and Beginnings

The baby undeniably provokes questions of origin and beginnings in both the child and the adult. For Arendt (1958b), natality is synonymous with her idea of action and signifies arrival and reception. To explain this link, particularly given that the idea of "action" is the basis of Arendt's understanding of thinking, Arendt (1958b) describes how "action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt by the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is of acting" (p. 9). In my reading of Arendt I see that natality exists on three levels. The first, primary or human natality comes in the form of the actual birth of a baby, a new person in the world. The second category is political natality and relates to the public and social world. The third category exists in the life of the mind and is related to new ideas and creativity. While Arendt's concept is often illustrated through

stories of private and family life (that perhaps offer the reader an emotional touchstone in order to grasp a difficult concept), the idea of natality is not solely about the baby. In some sense, Arendt disconnects birth from motherhood and family life and instead stresses its public significance and the possibility it brings. If to act is to bring something new into the world, it also opens up questions of what this newness carries with it, namely something we do not know and something that is beyond our control. Natality can be understood as the aspect of the human condition that cannot be predicted. The human infant stands in as a symbol of novelty and danger that originates from fear of the unknown and of the future. While natality provides a possibility for change and reflection, it also brings a fear of the potential that its arrival opens. Ultimately, Arendt posits a philosophical natality, one that exists across time and involves a past as well as a future. Natality incites both reflection and anticipation in the adult.

Arendt (1958a) argues that as outsiders, children seem to invade the world of adults, causing encounters that provoke confusion. Noting Arendt's idea that people are born rather than caused, Britzman (2009) discusses how Arendt

saw the child as a newcomer to the world, as a stranger to those already there. The child, a new human being, is in the process of becoming human. The child, in other words, begins with an uncertain relation to the world of others and to life itself. (p. 36)

The arrival of a child in the world is a conflict for the child and for us. This discord is also influenced by the gap in time between adults and children and the significance of the memories that settle in that space. If we consider natality, we must also recognize what separates us from the new that we have left behind. For Britzman (2009) "our infancy is made in relation to others" (p. 29), meaning that the baby only exists in the context of relations with other people. The child is relational, implying the absolute necessity and responsibility of the adult for the child's existence. Meltzer (2008) provokes us to think of the relationship between the mother and the baby as a dance of passion, dependence, enchantment,

and ambivalence. New ideas emerge as we think about this relationship including: the child as enigmatic, a phantasy and flexible to our desires. The adult has no control over what the future holds and cannot know what their reaction to the child will stimulate. This positions the child as a dependent and frightening novelty, provoking our responsibility and also causing our aversion.

In a context where the child is both a strange new creature and also in need of our guidance and care, Arendt (1958a) recommends that we “must take toward them an attitude radically different than the one we take towards one another” (p. 192), as it is our responsibility to introduce them to a dynamic and ever-changing world. To think in this way requires the adult to assume responsibility for the baby who arrives in a strange and unfamiliar realm. The adult must also take the role of protector for the world that receives these new creatures, creatures that arrive with all the unpredictability that action suggests. Natality demands an acknowledgement of time, age, and experience and highlights the problem of inter-subjectivity between adults and children.

In my interpretation, informed by Britzman’s (2009) work, natality embodies ideas of newness and carries with it both the risk of what we do not know and cannot predict, along with the promise of something different. One of the difficulties adults have in meeting newness is that adult natality has long since disappeared. Part of the friction in this relationship involves the adult’s inability to imagine being a newborn, resonating with Freud’s (1905) idea of infantile amnesia. While children’s natality may be reminiscent of the one we left behind, it also highlights our inability to remember what is held in the past and how this increases our distance from children. Infantile amnesia, an issue of repressing more than forgetting, restricts our access to the qualities and memories we attribute to childhood and leaves room for phantasy to emerge. From this understanding, I imagine we transfer our loss and lack of knowing onto our images of children, filling them with our anxieties, regrets, and wishes for a second chance. In this sense, natality may be understood as holding multiple traumas. The first trauma

is the assault of entering the world (as an alien), and while we do not know if the infant experiences it's own strangeness, we can surmise from Melzter's discussion of the "aesthetic conflict" that there is difficulty and confusion in these first encounters. The second trauma of natality is the experience of losing natality (or the death of childhood). This completion is symbolic but mythologized, and even though psychoanalysis unsettles the notion of linear time and development, we still dance between ideas of concrete endings and desire for what was. The third trauma of natality is the constant reminder of a past we cannot know that comes in the form of the very thing we cannot reclaim for ourselves - the child.

Anxiety and Representation

The insight provided by my interpretation of natality draws on much more than the notion of birth. The adult's natality has long since vanished and creates alienation to childhood in both time and understanding. If we look at growth as moving the human further and further away from birth we then as Steedman (1994) theorizes, we make growth automatically linked to death. So, the adult in effect lives with the knowledge that they are moving towards their expiration. Narrative is a tool where the image of the child defends against this awareness of mortality with the preservation of the child but conversely gives us space to play with notions of transience and death. Our representations of children allow us to pause, stall, and preserve our image of the child. I frame this use of the imaginary child as something called anti-development where it is acceptable to hold the child in the present and not push them towards maturation and in this same formulation we are able to see how the child must meet a series of losses that assist them in growing up.

As adults, we seem to collapse a number of concepts associated with our memories or feelings about childhood together, including: action, newness, birth, the baby, the child, and childhood. In this process of generalization, natality loses the distinctions that Arendt so carefully proposed. While this

collapse moves away from what Arendt may have intended and unleashes the potential for wild interpretation, it also gives an opportunity for analysis and imagination, or phantasy building. The action of flattening her theory presents an intriguing simplification. The breakdown of these concepts and the way they become muddled into one is an indication of our struggle to know what we lost. Distortion of the distinctions of natality is an attempt to cope with our loss of natality. And while it looks like we are trying to simplify the concept, our seeming simplification is actually a screen for natality's complexities.

Arendt (1958), Britzman (2009), and Lear (2006) all discuss the notion that ideas wear out as the world changes. As time passes, our symbols, representations, and understandings may no longer be operative and may cease to make sense. In relation to natality, this deterioration may be because our own experience with childhood is further from reach, and as adults, we have suffered all three traumas that natality presents (birth/alienation, loss, and mourning). As our relation to our notions of childhood fray the appeal for new concepts, which are tied to the possibility of a second chance, become more necessary. Britzman (2009) discusses how our time has worn out but "our mortality means that we are also responsible for making room for the new" (p. 37). As things stop making sense, the baby is born and in effect rescues us. Britzman (2009) describes this as "a curious insistence, for it suggests that our second chance does not belong to us" (p. 55). And so, here is the problem. Our views of the child are not just an issue of memory but the representations also illustrate our failure to recognize our own loss of natality and the significance this holds. This failure is partly intentional but also something that is beyond our control. At the same time that our constructions act as a method of trying to re-work the past through children in order to retain or re-find what was lost, these same wishes for and about children are an attempt to disguise our anxiety and cope with it.

The complications or phantasies of natality belonging to the shared human condition of loss are activated at multiple stages: being born, growing up, and trying to remember. The phantasies that developed in infancy pour out of the adult unknowingly and into a present world of relationships, while at the same time the adult transfers their current desires and anxieties onto their understanding of children, creating a phantasy child. This sophisticated process is related to what Freud (1899) calls the screen memory, which camouflages the impact of our injury. In this way, the conflicts from a person's early years and the distress of losing childhood are concealed among the intricate fabric of the psyche. Traces of this emotional world, bound to the past, seep into the present day but seem to go unnoticed or are misinterpreted. Indications of the loss of childhood arrive without context in the form of angst and dreams that are projected onto what is yet to come. This is evident in our stories of children, our claims about what they need, and the efforts we make to provide the best possible futures.

Clearly there are links to be made between what we are willing to believe about children and our own childhoods. Our natality can be imagined as a painful assault on our being. As children, we are constantly asked to give up what we understand to enter into a new world that does not yet exist for us. To reminisce on a violent and confusing beginning causes distress, which may be why we are infected by the defenses housed in our phantasy of childhood. The narrative of childhood is so marked by the injury of our own natality that we unwittingly refuse to acknowledge it.

In *Radical Hope*, Lear (2006) questions how people make meaning out of something that no longer exists and lives only in memory. Extreme cultural change can force the loss of the concepts we use to make sense of the world. The attempt to hold on to former concepts even when the myth is crumbling is what Lear calls *nostalgic evasion* (p. 97), whereby the actual process of mourning is replaced by an avoidance of the recognition that what we lost cannot be recovered. The distress of losing childhood promotes a particular kind of childhood narrative that often assists us in avoiding our

crisis. The narratives we currently use to think about childhood are very possibly akin to this process of evasion. Narratives about childhood are not merely a wistful desire to return to a former time or a bittersweet longing for past things, persons or situations, but a circumvention of our own history of newness or the wishes for our past. I propose this lack of knowing acts as a barrier to imagination and leaves us with rigid views about children and childhood. Lear's (2006) idea of *cultural unintelligibility*—where the meanings one took for granted are no longer operable—can also be tied to natality. In Lear's view, what saves us from despair and allows us to dream are enigmatic objects. I see the child as an exemplary example of an enigmatic object. Lear's (2006) understanding of unintelligibility can also be aligned to natality. Together these ideas examine the complications and understand more deeply the child as an enigmatic object – one that is subject to adult projections and used as a placeholder for their wishes, regrets, and anxieties. While the child-as-enigmatic presents an opportunity for representations of forgetting and loss, the figure of the child also contains, for the adult, a problem of knowing the fragility of development. The application of psychoanalytic thinking complicates this scenario further as the very idea of memory is put into question.

Freud's (1899) concept of screen memories tells us that there are past events we cannot remember but are formative. We cannot escape our infancy. The significance of these experiences leave impressions on the unconscious and these impressions have an afterlife. A return to conflict or experience of pressure makes us migrate to the grooves that were left behind by previous experiences (Freud, 1925). The essence of this patchwork of memory requires constructions in order to be articulated. A crisis in representation emerges because of the difficult nature of symbolizing something that was constituted prior to language. The crisis erupts through slips, mistakes, and emotion that are often found in our relationship to reading. And so, while reading offers us space to construct our representations of the child it also reveals our anxiety.

An Emotional Situation

The work of Klein and Riviere (1964) considers the emotional circumstance of the baby to be of serious consequence and posits that the child is relational and that their existence depends on the connection with the mother. The mother/child relationship has an enduring impact on the internal workings of the mind and the emotional life of the human. Riviere (1964) describes how in infancy there is a

first experience of something like death, a recognition of the *non*-existence of something, of an overwhelming loss, both in ourselves and in others, as it seems. And this experience brings an *awareness of love* (in the form of desire), and a *recognition of dependence* (in the form of need), at the same moment as, and inextricably bound up with, feelings and uncontrollable sensations of *pain and threatened destruction* within and without. (p. 9)

The idea of a conflicted mother/child relationship put forward by Klein and Riviere is further developed in Meltzer's (1988) idea of "aesthetic conflict", specifically in terms of the deeply passionate yet disturbed bond between the mother and the child. Here we must think about aesthetics that move us beyond our contemporary understanding of beauty and so release our notion of beauty from the boundaries of language. Meltzer explains the "aesthetic conflict" as "the aesthetic impact of the outside of the 'beautiful' mother, available to the senses, and the enigmatic inside which must be construed by creative imagination" (p. 22). In this arrangement, Meltzer locates crisis in the commonplace interactions between baby and mother. This crisis is mundane. He explains "the ordinary beautiful devoted mother holds her ordinary beautiful devoted baby and they are lost in the aesthetic impact of one another, however the experience of pain that resides in uncertainty tends towards distrust, verging on suspicion" (Meltzer, 1988 p. 26). The baby and the mother are caught in the beauty of one another but also in the mystery of what they cannot know about each other, making each of them

aware of their otherness. The mother mesmerizes the baby, but, for the baby, there is a risk of loss, of idealization, and the curiosity of “what is inside?” There is a terror in recognizing this beauty and confusion that is constituted by a loving relation and the anxiety of this lays the groundwork for the “aesthetic conflict” and can lead to an often ambivalent relationship where pleasure and pain are bound together and understood as the outcome of making intimate relations with another person. Encounters in intimacy and its transformation through the loss of natality have great psychological impact. Ordinary tensions, part of our shared human existence, are directly linked to experiencing and losing natality. “aesthetic conflict”, then, is not confined to the world of the infant and mother but extends itself into our life, reaching far beyond its beginnings.

According to Klein (1964), the baby learns to feel love when love is not present. This makes love anxious because love is first experienced in its own absence and when the mother is still an object (i.e., a breast) in the world of the baby. Love is founded not only in loss but also in a relationship to when the loss took place. Here a perception of time is developed in association with satisfaction, desire, and love. Phantasies that build amidst this anxiety are later transferred onto the actual mother who is no longer an object but, with time, has become whole.

***Annie John* in Analysis**

I discovered the novel *Annie John* when I was seeking literature that depicted the story of an adult reflecting back on childhood. My older sister, a significant player in my childhood and in my adult life, referred this book to me. *Annie John* is a novel that tells a story of natality that touches on all three levels (birth, social/political, and natality of the mind). Kincaid tells the story chronologically as she takes us through stages of Annie’s development. At the beginning of the story Annie is enveloped in the safety and happiness of her family life, all entangled in the relationship she has with her mother. As Annie experiences the first in a series of losses she starts to question and resent her mother.

Kincaid's novel carefully describes the intricate relationship between love and hate in the context of the child's relationship with the mother and with growing up. Annie's imagination and her experiences in school become the tools she uses to cope with growing up. Eventually, Annie leaves home, transformed by her adolescence, and ready to meet the world.

Annie John is a 10-year-old child of literature. What can she tell us about the questions of natality, loss, and childhood? Psychoanalysis suggests that *Annie John* is the narrative of a new baby's development of love and loss, an adolescent's experience with the return of "aesthetic conflict", and the work of an adult trying to narrate a past she cannot remember. This narrative contains all three traumas of natality (birth/alienation, loss and mourning). My psychoanalytic reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* emphasizes natality as significant and allows for an approach to the novel as a construction. This construction builds a narrative of development, where growing up is not something for the child to overcome as much as it is a conflict for adults to remember and to understand. Britzman (2009) describes how we fail to think about development as conflict, a revising of history, or a challenge of relationships with others and the isolation this might generate. The novel *Annie John* provides an opportunity to do so. The child of psychoanalysis is formulated through loss and is subject to the other while filled with desire, the child is also under imminent threat. In novels and through the relational process of reading, the child is transformed into an enigmatic object, which Lear (2006) suggests can help us find courage to meet crises in representation. In this novel, the deeply connected physical relationship between mother and child is conflicted, enamorous and mystifying. This echoes the "aesthetic conflict" Meltzer (1988) speaks of. In *Annie John*, time and are knowledge are distorted from the start.

Love, Loss and the Body

At 10 years old, Annie recalls her early years as a paradise; there her mother continues to be the most beautiful person in the world, and the two are inseparable. The novel offers a detailed account of the way her mother nurtures her with food, bath, bed, and clothes. Annie trusts her mother and their relationship and believes she need not need worry about her disappearing, dying, or leaving her alone in the world. Illustrations of love in the form of food and sustenance for the body are reflective of the infant's desire to be satisfied and hint at the transformation from hunger to love.

In Kincaid's first chapter "Figures in the Distance," Annie develops a fascination with death. Initially she knows little about death, but then a child dies. Annie recounts how her mother had to prepare the little girl to be buried. It is at this time, after seeing her mother touch the dead girl's forehead, that Annie begins to look at her mother's hands differently. The child desires sameness, does not see herself as separate, and so difference gives rise to tension. At this point, Annie cannot not bear to have her mother caress her or care for her anymore. With this realization, she associates her mother's hands with the death of a child, presenting new possibilities in how she can think about her mother. To see her mother as separate prompts the destruction of Annie's once perfect world. This new world acknowledges that children die and adults are implicated in this death. Difference creates trauma and shows the baby that she does not make the world.

The "The Circling Hand" contains Annie's earlier discovery of death and newfound anxiety about her mother's love. This coincides with changes in her own body and the discovery of a sexual relationship between her parents. Annie feels like she has turned into a "strange animal" (Kincaid, 1985, p. 25) and encounters unfamiliar responses from her mother who starts to "frown, offer looks of disapproval and speak with a strange and negative tone" (Kincaid, 1985, p. 28). Again, her mother's hands appear as a symbol of ugliness, confusion, and peculiarity:

I could see that my mother and father were lying in their bed. It didn't interest me what they were doing—only that my mother's hand was on the small of my father's back and that it was making a circular motion. But her hand! It was white and bony, as if it had long been dead and had been left out in the elements. It seemed not to be her hand, and yet it could only be her hand, so well did I know it. It went around and around in the same circular motion, and I looked at it as if I would never see anything else in my life again. If I were to forget everything else in the world, I could not forget her hand as it looked then. (Kincaid, 1985, p. 31)

The mother's childhood is long since dead, and, in Annie's eyes, her mother's hands lack the vitality they once had. The hands of the mother become the site of betrayal as they offer a different kind of touch—one for her father instead of one for her. Annie declares with certainty that she can never let those hands touch her again, can never let her mother kiss her again. Her mother's hands were meant to nurture her and were part of her, but, in the moment when they touch someone else, they distort and become separate, absent, and alter their purpose. This signifies the split between mother and baby and draws attention to the loss of love and lack of gratification for the child.

Initially the child sees her mother's body as part of her own, seeming almost attached to hers. Annie's feelings shift in correspondence to the changes in her own body. Annie's difference and separateness from her mother is realized in her body, as well as through her mother's body. Assigned to the body, the mother's betrayal becomes concrete and creates a place to exact revenge. Annie begins to house hate in her mother's absent body in response to her mother's touch being distributed to others (to her father and the dead child). In *Annie John*, the hands of the mother represent the difficulty of holding opposing things in the mind at the same time (love/loss, beauty/ugliness, knowing/not knowing), which we can call ambivalence. The beauty of the love relationship with the mother and the worry of losing it

set up this conflict of ambivalence which is the beginning of thinking, imagination and consequently subjectivity.

Phantasy Building

In “Gwen” and “The Red Girl,” suddenly things no longer fit; Annie no longer fits. Both of these chapters express how the child develops phantasies of omnipotence and power as she wants to control, change, or hurt her mother. These phantasies are a result of knowledge building and an experience in school. Knowing creates realization, that in turn creates revenge. As Annie spends more time in the public world of school she finds both a replacement mother and a phantasy self. Her mother provokes their divide when she disillusiones her and introduces the possibility of separate futures. Annie is engulfed by a force of hatred and explains: “My whole mouth filled up with a bitter taste, for I could not understand how she could be so beautiful even though I no longer loved her” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 53). Here we see Annie caught in the ambivalence of the “aesthetic conflict”—still finding her mother beautiful but falling out of love.

The bodies of both the child and the mother are the sites where the unconscious reveals itself. The phantasies of the body (e.g., transformation, destruction, pain) are phantasies of feelings. The child uses the destructive phantasies of infancy to propel their hate and the subsequent destruction of the mother. According to Klein (1964) this is a necessary piece of what must happen in order for the child to sever the mother/child relationship and become a subject. As the mother becomes unrecognizable, Annie learns about herself and the phantasies of natality begin to extend beyond the time of infancy. The child separates from the mother not only to gain subjectivity but also to free the mother.

The split from the mother creates an absence, and this loss requires a method of defense and a time to mourn. Kristeva (1987) has formulated the dilemma: separating from the mother ignites the

child's imagination and serves as both its fuel and its torment. This formulation is akin to Klein's (1964) ideas of the development of phantasy where the absence of the mother creates a lack. Unsatisfied need is partnered with impulses that move the child into creating substitutes for gratification and also propels the imagination to exact revenge on the mother for her absence.

Ignited by her interest in death and fueled by the burgeoning hate towards her mother, Annie begins to imagine her own death and the grief it would cause her parents. She phantasizes on the topic of hating her mother and begins to torment those she loves. In the attempt to destroy the object that has caused her pain (represented by her mother's hands), she externalizes the object making the mother recognizable as other. In this instance, we see how love is accompanied by the fear of disappearing, being given to someone else, and bringing pain or destruction. Klein's work (1958, 1959 and 1964) offers us the formulation that adult/child relationships develop in intimacy with destruction, and grow out of a desire for and wish to destroy the other. In this constellation, and in its own defense, the child may become a kind of "monster" or may believe themselves to be one. The loathing of her beautiful mother energized through the "aesthetic conflict" demonstrates Annie's rage and suggests the fear of her own imminent death.

Annie stops fearing her mother's death as she indulges in phantastical and scary images of her mother (as a crocodile for example). As her phantasies expand she invents new ways to explore ideas of death and thinks, "my mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage" (Kincaid, 1985, p. 89). So, instead of fearing her mother's death, Annie contemplates killing her.

Phantasy exists across dimensions of time, knowing no bounds. It provides the opportunity to both delay and supply gratification as well as distort ideas of time in the moment that they are forming. Perhaps we can conceive of phantasy as a way to manage or endure time and as a place that allows for

imaginative ways to wait, yearn, and fear. While this strategy is not intellectual in its nature, it provides a way for the body to tolerate the reality of the present through emotional expression while maintaining connections to the future and the past. Klein (1959) explains how

love and hate towards the mother are bound up with the very young infant's capacity to project all his emotions on to her, thereby making her into a good as well as dangerous object.

However, introjection and projection though they are rooted in infancy, are not only infantile processes. (p. 250)

Desires cannot be fulfilled in childhood and so are carried into adulthood as the site of possible realization (Klein, 1964). This permits phantasy to be imagined as simultaneously fleeting and eternal as it extends forward into our adult lives.

Expressions of anxiety are also ways to pleasure the self, temporarily fulfill desire, and express feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, and hate. The anxiety that Annie develops is part of the complicated love relationship she has with her mother as well as her gains in knowledge and the implication of language for her thinking and feeling. Annie's anxiety gives her the ability to imagine, phantasize, and begin to see herself as separate. This new knowing challenges the image of the mythical mother who shares her body with the baby. However, what Annie cannot know as a child and may not remember or understand as an adult, is that her mother *must* disillusion her (Winnicott, 1971) in order to sever the attachment of their love relationship so that Annie can grow up. In the novel, this disillusion comes in the form of insults and embarrassment, forced rites of passage, and removing the methods of delivering satisfaction. These particular methods of disenchantment are used in order to guarantee the split in the mother/child relationship and to initiate the death of Annie's childhood in order for her to gain subjectivity.

Language and Learning

In the novel's later chapters, Annie plays with power dynamics, practices extreme expressions of affection, and works out feelings of hate through her experiences with language, knowledge, and school. In this way, knowledge functions as a bridge between opposing worlds (private/public, internal/external, and phantasy/reality) and provides a space for thinking. Thinking in this place of ambivalence and unpredictability gives rise to action.

"Columbus in Chains" places Annie in school and suggests that gathering knowledge through education and language is an attempt to both break away from the past, and a method of trying to understand it. "Columbus in Chains" teases us with a reversal of roles and play on words. The chapter's title emphasizes that the knowledge keepers start to be excluded from particular kinds of knowing. It awakens us to the increasing power the child has over the adult, as the child changes but the adult remains locked in a phantasy of the child. School also literally separates the child from their parents. This segregation of children into a world all their own is something Arendt (1958a) critiques and identifies as part of the crisis in education. Kristeva (1987) argues that once the child is separate from the mother and knows there is no going back, she is provoked to try and recover her through imagination and eventually through language. This unconscious attempt at recuperation is consistent with Freud's constructions, and through this process we see childhood survive and become, as Rose (1984) says, "something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history" (p. 12). Meltzer (1988) illustrates a similar understanding as he describes how the "aesthetic conflict" must eventually find its symbolic representation in order to become available for "dream thoughts, transformation into verbal language (or other symbolic forms, as in the arts) and elaboration through abstraction, condensation, generalization and other instruments of sophisticated thinking" (p. 20), which lead to the later ability to tolerate the ambivalence inherent in an "aesthetic conflict". For

the purposes of self-development, language becomes the substitute for these losses and provides satisfaction through the process of sharing narratives with others and using the imagination. Kristeva (1996) describes how:

speech is a cold abstraction extraneous to the body-to-body contact with the mother, to the warm dimension of echolalia, rhythms, perceptions, and sensations; extraneous to the sensory, it situates the subject in the frustration of the absence of objects that were once immediately satisfying. Speech is frustration but also compensation, for it is the source of new pleasures and new powers, which are the benefits contributed by the abstract: hallucinations, representations, and thought salvage and refashion what was lost. (p. 84-85)

The estrangement from our own natality and the trauma of this loss is repressed and the void filled by speech. Language becomes a substitute for the loss of the mother's body and the absence of her aesthetic impact.

Kincaid's "Somewhere, Belgium" engages the phantasy of a future life and the possibilities of an adult self that emerge due to the separation from the mother and the impact of the educational experience. Throughout the novel, the adult withholds information from the child. This establishes the adult not only as the keeper of time but also the keeper of knowledge. Annie's information about death initiates a change in her as she gains access to adult knowledge. As Annie grows she develops phantasies but hides them from her mother, reflecting the growing division between mother and child and a differentiation in what they know, claim to know and cannot know. And, in acknowledging that there are many things kept from children, we often forget there is something the adult cannot know about the child.

It is paradoxical that language—the expression of our thinking but also a replacement for the absent mother (the lost object) (Kristeva, 1966)—is the tool used in attempts to explore and reclaim

childhood. It is both a satisfying yet frustrating substitute. Language—an aesthetic experience that stands in for what was lost—offers its own sense of gratification but it is still not directly reflective of our loss.

The Death of Childhood

The transformation of the body from child to adult is characterized as an illness in “The Long Rain.” This sickness returns Annie to her infancy. Words disappear again and she is drawn back to the impressions left behind by her past experiences. Annie’s dream life is vivid and she re-finds the beauty of her mother: all of this is necessary in order for childhood to pass. To frame the end of childhood as a symbolic death brings back the essence of the infant’s fear of losing the mother and highlights the difficulty of meeting the other and knowing the self. The parents wait in mourning for their child to die. Annie’s illness and recovery symbolize the changes in her body and the process of growing up. This sickness can also be perceived as an act of penance in the beginning of Annie’s reparation project. Generated by the guilt of destructive phantasies toward her mother, the reparation required is a kind of mistimed atonement, happening long after the imagined attacks (Klein, 1964). Time seems supple in the phantasy world of relationships where past can be future and present can be past. In experiencing new forms of loss, the conflict and trauma of the baby returns. Annie’s illness brings her closer to her mother and offers an opportunity to make amends for the destruction contained in earlier phantasies and the imaginary killing of her mother.

In the final story “A Walk to the Jetty,” the process of acquiring knowledge moves Annie into the public realm where leaving her home in Antigua is representative of leaving childhood behind. Her education is complete and Annie’s path is to leave the island, but, just as her mother before her, Annie thinks she will enter the future with no trace of the past. Instead, it follows her forward. She pursues the same path as her mother but sees it as her own. While the child’s separation from the mother seems

evident in the physical sense, she carries her mother with her. The enigmatic qualities of the mother outlive childhood and follow Annie across the ocean.

Phantasies of Love, Mothers and Growing Up

Annie John is story of looking back, a reflection on childhood. This novel also tells the tale of the baby and mother separating from each other and the conflict this generates; the “aesthetic conflict” re-imagined. Arendt’s ideas of natality transform as they are used for the basis for my new concept of the phantasies of natality.

An analysis of *Annie John* helps to describe the impact phantasies of natality have on our representations of the child and the way in which we internalize these representations. Each chapter in *Annie John* presents the possibility of thinking about our relationship to childhood and unearths themes of the body, dimensions of time, and knowing. *Annie John* also tells us a story of beginnings and communicates the possibility of existing in multiple spaces and times. The story contains gaps where there is no memory or narrative for what has happened. In this sense, the novel withholds, is incomplete, and the time of childhood is disrupted. This gives space to imagination and the story can be interpreted in multiple ways at once. These newfound phantasies of natality raise the salience of my four themes and highlight particular elements that push through as most relevant. While reading, the distinctions between the two types of phantasies of natality become blurred. The phantasies belonging to natality, our infancy and our pre-linguistic selves are blended together with our phantasies about natality, both children’s and ours.

To originally encounter love in an experience akin to death, as Riviere (1964) suggests, implies that *all* prospective love relationships are innately fearful. To see development as a conflict, as Britzman (2009) puts forward, changes our relationship to it. Kincaid’s novel structures the child’s growth as what I term anti-development, which is development that is constituted by a series of losses

that exposes the future as a space of desire and of probable disappointment. If sensations of love, phantasy, and concepts of time are created in combination with each other and are initially expressed in infancy without language, this implies they are interconnected in their beginnings, inseparable in their present, independent of speech, and consistently tied up in tension with each other. Love undoubtedly has a relationship with time, and one aspect of this is the fear of a potential future loss. In *Annie John*, the mother becomes the keeper of time and has the capacity to effect all future love relations. It is as if her actions are the things that stall time, move time, and make the future come to pass. This is reflective of the way we try to hold, keep and manage time in our constructions of children and childhood. Time becomes flexible in this transformed notion of natality and inside the novel. Malleable time is able to position the body as the site of betrayal but also a place of victory, while knowledge becomes a site of power for the changing child but also a means of paralysis for adult phantasies.

The subjectivity arising from conflicted beginnings is a fundamental element in a complex world of relations. Relationality is not only a system of worlds in communication with each other but a series of interactions that move between and around concepts of self/other, internal/external, conscious/unconscious, and reality/phantasy. In other words, relationality is a way of being in time with others and reminds us that questions of the child exist only in relation to other people. Language makes this more complex.

Kincaid's *Annie John* questions conceptions of the child as "becoming" and the adult as "arrived," particularly due to the symbolic way the mother and child must act out their destructive phantasies in order for the future to come to pass. This is where we recognize that the term natality and the phantasies I have attached to it have evolved from the notion that Arendt first presented. Arendt gives us birth without motherhood, the philosophical natality she describes leaves room for both imagination and anxiety as it occupies all dimensions of time. However, a most significant

transformation of the concept of natality throughout this chapter is the persistent and commanding presence of the mother. While, Arendt's discussion leaves the mother out, in this reading the manifestation of the mother and the accompanying mother/child relation, forces itself from the heart of the narrative and onto centre stage.

I have explored three views of the mother/child relation through readings of Meltzer, Klein and Kristeva. Each offers a different method of theorizing the adult/child relation and its roots in infancy but collectively these understandings make space for the phantasies of natality I describe. Meltzer's "aesthetic conflict" asks us to think about the passionate but ordinary bond between the mother and the child. Inside Meltzer's concept, the terror found in the love and beauty of a mysterious mother and the problem of what we cannot know, about her and ourselves, exists from the beginning. The mother is enigmatic from the start rather than becoming a mystery once the child is separated and busy working on the task of growing up. The "aesthetic conflict" is concerned with phantasies and so requires imagination and asks us to dream up enigmatic objects. The mother/child relation becomes the site for betrayal and the generation of destructive phantasies conveyed by Klein. What does it mean if we view this mother/child relation as disturbed from its roots? If love and loss are bound together as Klein depicts then it may be easier to understand how the relationship between love and hate. This new construct illustrates the way an unsatisfied need is partnered with inclinations that move the child into creating substitutes for gratification, and eventually driving the imagination to exact revenge for the mother's absence. Kristeva explains how speech is difficult but also an attempt to satisfy or reward the pains associated with the loss of the mother/child relationship of infancy. So, we might reframe the process of learning to talk, to read, to write as both a reaction against the mother but also an attempt to locate her love in the enigma. Growing up is about revenge followed by loss and mourning, but at the same time growing up is learning to cope with desire for what was or what could be re-imagined.

The representation of the child in *Annie John* is one that is used and exists in relation to the mother. The child's body becomes a container or holding place for knowledge and transformation. The body of both mother and child are sites of betrayal but also of learning. Knowledge is the place where separation can occur but this space of learning also opens an emotional reservoir. The mother does not emerge in this story of childhood. Rather, she pushes through as a necessary piece for the child's thinking and claim to their subjectivity. Much of this mother/child relationship is formed pre-linguistically, placing importance on the experiences that happen prior to speaking. A crisis in representation emerges as the adult struggles to re-create what they cannot symbolize or put into words. Our constructions are needed to explore this conflict but they are not the real thing, and they never will be. The construction of the child appears to be driven by the wishes of the one who has left childhood behind, but is also informed by the anxiety of meeting the new. This relationship is embedded with understandings, beliefs and tensions relating to time, knowledge, and the body. Even as a reader, one cannot escape the problems of thinking about natality. Phantasies of natality are both the phantasies that belong to the pre-linguistic baby and the phantasies we (who have lost our childhood) have about natality. When reading the novel, both aspects of these phantasies present themselves.

The construction of the child that emerges through a psychoanalytic reading of *Annie John* is one that we meet in partnership with our imagination. This child is a method of tolerating the ““aesthetic conflict””. Attempts to recover the child, the mother, and the past appear throughout life and particularly in times of emotional breakdown. These recovery attempts are complicated by the return to infancy that arises during this process. The desire to know and to make reparation is encouraged and confused by the “aesthetic conflict” that materializes again as ambivalence when we are confronted by the feelings of love/hate, beauty/ugliness, and comfort/discomfort at the same time. Memory traces drive us to create images of the child that might help us manage these feelings and what

becomes apparent is that the concept of childhood belongs to a story concerned with aesthetic relationships. The heightened receptivity, which we often assign to children, reflects the way Spitz (2006) talks about aesthetics as the opposite of numbness, as the state of feeling, sensing, perceiving, and imagining. This understanding grants us the ability to conjure and go beyond the limitations associated with space and time. The concept of the child that develops through this chapter is constituted by loss and caught from the very beginning in an “aesthetic conflict” with the mother. Also revealed is that our construction of the child offers us an aesthetic of childhood and that phantasies seem to make present that which is absent. To see the child as both a construction and an adult experience, as I propose at the beginning of the chapter, we can read the child as an aesthetic response that is part of our act of mourning for the loss of childhood, and as reparation for our destructive phantasies towards the mother.

Reading as Natality

The complexities of self/other relationships, the roots of love and their link to loss, the death of childhood, and the discovery of the self all become thinkable in the world of the novel. *Annie John* begins to make a case for literature as a tool to explore the problem of representing the past, childhood, and children in light of our own experience with natality. This loss of natality leaves a gap and a series of unfulfilled desires. United with this is the loss of the mother, which is expressed primarily as rejection and then as a pursuit of this enigmatic figure.

Annie John is a novel of wanting to recover or repair the damage that was done both to and by the mother. The idea of natality mapped out at the beginning of this chapter now consciously makes room for the mother, leaving us with two enigmatic objects that seem necessary as we try to make a relation to our past. Our phantasies of natality are not only those that abide and guide our constructions of the child, they are also a contributing factor to how we make “mothers” in our representations. As

we gain knowledge in the world, a more difficult knowledge emerges, one that re-creates the conflict of development and our struggle with not knowing the enigma of the mother or the child.

As with any novel, *Annie John* is continuously renewed and re-interpreted by each reader that encounters it. Annie John—the fictional child—provides us an opportunity to reconstruct ideas about childhood and its loss and to play with our current desires for and about the child. Reading offers what Spitz (2008) calls “primordial aesthetic empathy” (p. 552)—a time when the protective layer of the self disappears and one lives naked in another shell. Reading makes us aware of what we do not know and what we cannot know. I now think about reading as a form of natality and how our own reading practices reflect a relationship to action and unpredictability. The novel can tell us things about our birth and can reveal our mother, but we are still not in charge of literature, and reading itself is unstable. A psychoanalytic reading suggests that the conflicts of love and loss from infancy may be revisited in childhood but are also unconsciously present in the adult. These tensions reveal themselves and are worked through in collaboration with an experience with reading literature.

To consider reading as a *potential space* for reconstructions and draw from Britzman’s (2006, 2009) work where literature is understood to have the capacity to say more than it means, literature becomes a location for possibilities and language. In this context literature finds ways to articulate the essence of an encounter and welcomes us into an imaginary constellation of experiences where the problem of natality and its loss are uniquely explored. The complexities of self/other relationships and the affect of forgotten histories of childhood become thinkable in the world of a novel through the process of literary reconstruction. It takes courage to draw on enigmatic concepts especially in the space of literature where our knowledge of childhood is challenged and where we explore aesthetic experiences that pre-date language. The child in fiction offers conceptions of childhood that move us

beyond experiences and observations of real children. To position the child as enigmatic quickly reveals the enigmatic qualities belonging also to the figure we call mother.

Chapter Three: Motherless Babies, Melancholia, and the Search for the Lost Object

Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (Freud, 1899, SE 3, p. 322)

In this chapter, I explore Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) as a site to help think about problems of love, loss, and memory through the lens of infantile phantasy, *nachträglichkeit*, and lost objects. If we think about childhood and its memories as constructions, then we give ourselves permission to play with temporality, emotional significance, and the ways in which we understand memory and read it onto childhood. Freud's words in the closing passage of "Screen Memories" above tell us that memories of childhood are based on an emotional arousal that happens long after the actual experience. Freud differentiates between the words *emerge* and *form*. To emerge implies something becomes known, comes into view, and is uncovered, but to form is to create, build, and put something together. Memories of childhood are formed after the experience has passed, and so, when we "remember," we are actually constructing. When we design ideas of childhood they are guided by an emotional and aesthetic response. This is related to the return of the "aesthetic conflict", where the feelings from a particular time or experience are provoked but in a brand new context and time. To see the child as an aesthetic response means recognizing that the loss of natality leaves us with a gap and a series of unfulfilled desires and that our construction is an attempt to fill this void and understand what is missing. The arousal animated by these unsatisfied wishes is the thing that motivates and stimulates memory building. However, in this chapter we meet children without mothers. What does it mean to construct childhood without the mother?

The concept of *nachträglichkeit* is not mentioned in Freud's passage, but it is present. In simple terms, *nachträglichkeit* is deferred action. It assists us in thinking about the relationship between a significant event and its later reinvestment with meaning. *Nachträglichkeit* generates questions about time and temporality, and it is this thinking that guides much of this chapter.

Ishiguro's Novel World

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, creates a world where the "students" at Hailsham are without parents. It is a school full of motherless children who are created as copies, cared for by "guardians," and raised for a specific purpose. Nothing comparable to a family structure exists for the protagonist Kathy H. and Ruth, Tommy, and others. These children live isolated from the world but are carefully educated about its ways. Nothing is known or shared with them about their origins, early experiences, or life prior to Hailsham. I was introduced to this novel in a weekly graduate school seminar. A gripping and mysterious story, it reveals its secrets slowly. As the class discussed Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* a thread of anxiety was always running through the conversation. This concern was centered on the Hailsham students' lack of origins and the potentially devastating effects this had on their development, psychically and otherwise. This anxiety motivated my thinking.

In this chapter, the first area of questions develop from inside a complex formulation about love and loss provided by Klein & Riviere (1964). The loss experienced in infancy generates love and phantasy but is not remembered by anyone. However, understanding what Klein and Riviere (1964) describe as the emotional situation of the baby is made more difficult when the baby has no beginning. I investigate how for the child with no mother, like the children at Hailsham, the lost object is not only disguised through the craft of screen memories (Freud, 1899), but is unknowable in both conscious and unconscious realms. The child's questions of origin are diverted by the orchestration of "Collections" which essentially cover up the need to search for the lost object. The creation of a phantasy site, which

in the case of this novel is Norfolk, provides a potential space that holds the promise of imagination and the strength to play with phantasy.

A second terrain of questions emerge and draw on Freudian ideas of deferred action, causing tension with my previous theorizing about the phantasies of natality, a concept that is a combination of Arendt's ideas about natality and my own questions about our investment in the image of the child, all guided by psychoanalytic thinking. The pursuit of our childhood (and the trauma that drives it) relies on attaching loss to objects so memories become representative of the search to recover a feeling of satisfaction, or a feeling of love. However, the quest becomes distorted once we realize it relies on memory that is not accurate in the way we often assume memory to be. The concept of *nachträglichkeit* is one way to inquire into how and why we construct narrative in the face of this complexity. Perhaps through the process of deferred action, we are able to narrate our childhood and find a way to destroy and re-imagine our phantasy of the mother, even if she never existed.

Reading For The Mother

I was quickly enchanted by the world of *Never Let Me Go*. I found myself swept up in Ishiguro's dystopian world as it easily became entangled with my own imaginings. I was tested by the difficulty of reading the child without the mother and in this case not just an abandoned or orphaned child but one that had no mother at all. I felt a version of the anxiety that my graduate school colleagues expressed during seminar discussion around the fear for (or of) the child who has no origins to seek. In *Never Let Me Go*, the children are stories. The adults who were once those very children describe them to us, or create them for us. The story is narrated by Kathy H. As she tells her childhood story she exposes how her early experiences inform her current obsessions, although her understanding of this process remains unclear.

While reading, I became implicated. I wished a mother for Kathy H., and part of my investment while reading was a push for her to find her mother or at least a possible one. My understanding of childhood demonstrated that I could not separate thinking about the child from my own childhood memories and that this child is obliged to exist in combination with the representation of the mother, whether her representation is complete or merely confirms the impact of her absence. Even in *Never Let Me Go*, where children have no actual mother, they imagine something they call their “possible.” The possible is someone they have no concept for and have no chance in finding, but they, too, cannot escape her. The phantasy of the mother exists even for the child who has never had one. I could not imagine the mother away. I did not know how.

Infancy as Inauguration

Riviere (1964) explains that the infant’s early experience of loss and absence gives birth to a feeling of desire (that we name love) and identification of need (for a gratifying object), that are both harnessed to feelings of fear, anxiety, and sensations of pain. It is in this space and moment that the human first feels something we call love. Klein and Riviere’s (1964) configuration tells us of the infant’s emotional situation where the relationship between absence and love and implies that love is born out of our first experience with extreme loss. This means we only know love when it is taken away. Love, then, is a desire for something, a longing for a thing of great satisfaction that is now missing. Therefore, the love the baby develops is anxious because this love is experienced in its own absence and because at the time it appears, the mother is still an object (i.e., a breast) in the world of the infant. Klein (1964) explains:

The baby, to whom his mother is primarily only an object which satisfies all his desires—a good breast, as it were—soon begins to respond to these gratifications and to her care by

developing feelings of love towards her as a person. But this first love is already disturbed at its roots by destructive impulses (pp. 59-60).

Klein complicates things by also asking: From where does destruction emerge? Do our destructive impulses develop in our love relationships or in the loss of this love? These questions suggest that perhaps love and loss are the same thing. In this struggle between love and hate (between gratification and its lack,) a baby's impulses and feelings are partnered with what Klein (1964) describes as the primitive mental activity of "phantasy building, or more colloquially imaginative thinking" (p. 60), or the beginning of imagination. In a sense, the baby imagines the object they have lost. This phantasy is about moving towards finding a gratifying object; one that appeases, gives pleasure, and satisfies as we attempt to replace what has been taken away. Consequently, love is accompanied by the fear it will disappear again, bringing pain and destruction. The loss we experience in infancy is so powerful that it not only manufactures our understanding of love it also extends onto all future love relationships.

Theoretical Problems or the Trouble with Theory

In the process of reading *Never Let Me Go*, I found that a number of my theories decided not to cooperate. To use psychoanalysis, and particularly Klein and Riviere's (1964) formulation to think about the development of a human being's psychical structure and the place of phantasy in emotional relationships with the self and others, means to accept that these processes begin in infancy and establish themselves in the time of early childhood. However, when thinking about this in relation to Kathy H.'s narrative, we are entreated to investigate a number of new questions. I formulated a new idea called the phantasies of natality. This theory is built on Arendt's notions of natality, combined with Britzman's psychoanalytic interpretation and my own thinking informed by Kristeva, Klein, and Freud. This theory includes both the phantasies of the baby during natality and the phantasies the adult

has of natality long after it has passed. The child, with all the newness it brings, makes us want to segregate it, hold it in place, and protect it. The reason behind this is that the child triggers for the adult a longing for the past, a wish to capture lost childhood, and a fear of the unknown.

The phantasies we have of childhood are controlled and maintained by the way we talk and think about children. These phantasies provide us a method of attempting to re-create, re-work, or revolt against our actual experience by creating an image of the child that feeds into what we wish our own childhood was and what we want for actual children. In an experience with reading, we are invited into a potential space of imagining children in alternate ways and indulging in phantasies about childhood that we might not otherwise explore. The very idea that childhood is a loss impacting us for eternity, but is also something that cannot be captured, is deeply affecting. However, *Never Let Me Go* does not fit the formula and at first appears to turn my theory on its head. In this story, the child has no origin and no beginning. Kathy H. is a clone. We have no information on her past and neither does she. She is a laboratory creation (like Frankenstein's monster) that has not known love in the way we understand it or in the way that Klein and Riviere trace its beginnings. A child without an origin story becomes a child without a mother. The mother I speak of here is both literal, a real mother that can be seen and touched, as well as a figure, representative of a larger idea about how we gain our subjectivity. Without a mother, you cannot feel her absence. This raises the question: If love is created through the loss of and then the longing for the mother, how do you learn love without her? The loss in infancy, of the breast, the milk, the mother, the body, is substantial even if it is momentary. The absence is the space of love, and the desire for the mother is the symbol of the loss. If you do not know love, then how can you recognize you do not have it anymore? Or consider the contrary: Without loss of the object of satisfaction, then how can you long for it and learn to love?

Love and Phantasy

Love's relationship with time is built upon the fear of a potential future loss and the need to find, protect, and recover the lost object. The loss of the object inaugurates the meeting of the self, the recognition of the other, the death of childhood, and learning to talk. The loss of the object also reveals how loss is both relational and constitutive of an inner life. The object can be idealized and substituted so that pursuing it is a way to regain the satisfaction of the love relationship and/or to punish (in phantasy or reality) the object that has vanished. In this formulation, it seems impossible to love without loss, regardless if this injury is one we can remember. The search to recover becomes a deeply hidden search to uncover. Phantasy gets collected and stored but remains active and influencing throughout life in attempts to make present what is absent. Infantile phantasy is therefore not actual infancy but afterthoughts or imprints of infancy that rule our current desires and emotions.

The very ideas of phantasy and reality are difficult to define if we are thinking from a psychoanalytic perspective. Klein differentiates *phantasy* from *fantasy*, with the former being the state of mind of an infant during the early stages of development. During the pre-linguistic period, infants make very little differentiation, if at all, between reality and imagination. Phantasy is constructed from internal and external reality but modified by feelings and emotions and projected onto both real and imaginary objects. This phantasy stems from the baby's needs, drives, and instincts and appears in symbolic form in our dreams, our play, and obsessions. Differentiating between phantasy and reality becomes most difficult at the time when a child must start to make distinctions between imagination and real life. The idea of phantasy building or the development of imagination and symbolization is a potential bridge between the conflicting ideas in my analysis. Slippages between phantasy and reality happen easily, rendering them fluid so that making distinctions between the two becomes a challenge.

No Mother? No Love?

Kathy H. is without a beginning and so I felt compelled to dream one for her. I created a myth of her origins that became more attached to my own phantasies with each page that I read. In my reading, I attempted to create a past for Kathy H. just as I have unknowingly endeavored to reconstruct my own childhood through my phantasies of natality. I wished that Kathy H. would find her “possible” and that they would innately know each other. I hoped that she could love and then feel love in return, but Kathy H.’s initial love object is unknown to us and her. The novel talks of childhood, and so we assume she was once a baby. I yearned to know who fed her, held her, changed her, and put her to sleep. I wondered what represented her sensations of love and satisfaction. I also speculated that there must be a barrier to phantasizing and symbolization for Kathy H. and the others, especially as they grow up. When working with psychoanalytic theory, it is almost impossible to understand or think about a baby without thinking about a mother. But *Never Let Me Go* asks us to do just that. The phantasies of natality seem to no longer apply when thinking about Kathy H. and Hailsham. However, letting go of the mother in our traditional ways of thinking allows us to imagine new kinds of mothers and new kinds of children.

Perhaps the love of a motherless child is the strongest kind of love, which asks us to consider a very different kind of adult/child relationship. Perhaps, Kathy H. is without the destructive phantasies that emerge in the loss of love that we have normalized for ourselves. She may then be free from guilt for destroying her mother because she had no mother to begin with. This means she has no need for reparation and no phantasy of destruction, only longing. With complete absence and no guilt for destroying the other, the child has the ability to imagine the mother to be anything. The longing the child feels for this imagined mother is so powerful because of the infinite possibilities this imagined figure may represent. This imaginary mother may also be more easily substituted through the freedom

of phantasy that is not tied to any actual history or hidden by screen memories. Conversely, through another lens, we can see Kathy H. as representative of all of us. This situation may not be unique to Kathy H. but is similar to how we all feel once we rid ourselves of our mothers in order to gain our subjectivity and epitomizes how we feel once we have committed the never fully reparative act of becoming a subject.

With an unidentified object of satisfaction, Kathy H. distorts her attachment and phantasy and places it onto actual objects rather than in feelings or people. This is revealed through the way she tells stories and is also when questions of memory come into play. How accurate is our storytelling, our narration of our past, and our understanding of our own experience? Does accuracy actually matter? Are we required to construct ourselves through narration and other kinds of representations because we cannot rely on our memory due to its phantasy problems? Our ideas of reality can also be put into question when we make room for concepts like deferred action, or *nachträglichkeit*, which is also considered a mistiming of learning in narrative.

The object of love for Kathy H. and the students of Hailsham is unknown. The loss of the object inaugurates the temporary loss of the self. Loss is relational. Like Kathy H. and the other students in *Never Let Me Go*, every infant experiences a loss they cannot remember. We must imagine a beginning for ourselves, just as Kathy H. must. Most of our childhood experiences are fragmented and preserved only as memory traces, with no way of knowing or finding the “truth.” For Klein (1964) “the breast” is the lost object. It is the absence of the mother that gives birth to the feeling of love in the baby. According to Klein & Riviere (1964), the loss of the breast, or the loss of the object, guides the search for satisfaction and the love object through one’s entire life. Holding on to stories about objects highlights the importance of objects as screens that cover up but sit in and around the actuality of experience, feeling, and desire. Kathy H.’s relation to objects offers clues that suggest that she is on a

quest for her origins and has a wish to know who she is. There is a satisfaction experienced in infancy that can never be found in phantasy or reality because it does not exist in any form and because there is no adequate substitute.

Nachträglichkeit and Narrative

Our construction of narrative is both part of our phantasy and our attempt to understand what really happened. Narrative is filled with slippages between what we desire, what we imagine, and the pieces we think are accurate. Kathy H. tells us her story as if it were fact. However, we must remember that she is looking back and layering her representations in reflection. She tells her stories long after they have happened and embeds them with the emotions aroused by the experience and knowledge she has gained since that time. This creates an intricate story where phantasy and reality cannot easily be differentiated.

Nachträglichkeit can also be called deferred action or afterwardness. We can see it in the temporal sense of “later” but its disruption of chronology also highlights questions of time. Laplanche (in Caruth, 2001) discusses how there are two ways Freud looked at nachträglichkeit. The first is a movement from the past in the direction of the future, acknowledging that something is deposited in the individual that will be reactivated later. The second is a movement from future to past with reflections on what was before but augmented by current understanding. In order to understand the temporal aspect of nachträglichkeit, or afterwardness, you have to take into account what is not known, both at the beginning, and later (Laplanche in Caruth, 2001). Nachträglichkeit is also understood as deferred action between the experience and understanding. The past is woven into the present to revise the past, but remains caught in its phantasies. As a result, there is a temporality lag, and all is clouded as phantasies are projected onto the current scene but are changed. In *Never Let Me Go*, time becomes supple as Ishiguro allows the reader to move back and forth between the present and the past,

intermixed with pieces of Kathy H.'s desired future. Here we can see *nachträglichkeit* at play. Affect is transferred from a past experience to the present or added to the telling of the past until the two events can seem related or even combined.

Screen Memories

So, how does this help us understand Kathy H. and her story? We know she is not sure of the accuracy of her tale. Kathy H. speaks her words as fact but also begins many parts of her story with words of doubt. This lack of confidence stems both from her uncertainty about her past but also from her suspicions about the accuracy of her memory. Ishiguro (2005) presents us with a series of narratives that overlap and shift within spaces of time. The confidence of Kathy H., as narrator, is repositioned with each recollection she shares. Her faith in her own memory wavers between a sense of absolute certainty and a marked hesitation. Many of her stories begin with phrases like, "I suppose," "Looking back now I guess," and "I'm not sure." This confusion can be connected to reflecting back on the process of construction and the weakness of memory as truth.

At the end of Freud's (1899) "Screen Memories," he raises a discussion about falsified memories. The particular childhood memories he speaks of are often proven untrue when checked against the recollections of adults. This is not to say they did not happen at all but that they are distorted forms of information. The time, place, and people are mixed up in the content of the memory. He does not equate blurring to inaccuracy of recall and instead suggests that these confused memories serve as repression for uncomfortable ideas and effects. The discussion of falsified memories brings screen memories and other memories from childhood closer together. He states:

It is perhaps altogether questionable whether we have any conscious memories *from* childhood: perhaps we only have memories *of* childhood. These show us the first years of our lives not as

they were, but as they appeared to us at later periods when the memories were aroused. (Freud, 1899, p. 559)

Regardless, many experiences of great significance happen in infancy and develop prior to language and symbolization. Freud questions the content of early memories in that they usually consist of trivial details that have minimal impact on the child while other critical experiences in the same time period are not remembered at all. Freud (1899) asks why the mind “suppresses what is significant but retains what is of no consequence” (p. 544).

A screen memory can be understood “as one that owes its value as a memory not to its intrinsic content, but to the relation obtaining between this content and some other, which has been suppressed” (Freud, 1899, p. 557). This means that the screen memory is an incomplete form. The forgotten elements, or as Freud (1899) stressed, the elements that have been omitted, contain everything that made a childhood experience memorable and provide a clue to the actuality of that experience. This is a battle of two psychological forces, with one seeing the importance of the experience as a motive for it to be remembered, and the other opposing and resisting this. A type of compromise is reached between the two powers with the result that “instead of the memory image that was justified by the original experience, we are presented with another, which is to some extent associatively displaced from it” (Freud, 1899, p. 545). It is here that screen memories gesture towards something but at the same time act as a defense. The screen memory holds a place in the mind for masked pieces of the past. Anxieties are bound to nameless events of history and reveal themselves in the present as misplaced or broken parts of memory.

In the battle between knowing and not knowing our attempts to defend against childhood, to construct it as banal or beautiful may all be methods of protecting ourselves from the phantasies of natality and the guilt over our destructive tendencies. It is also the desire for a better, imagined

beginning and the work of nostalgic evasion (Lear, 2006) that helps to maintain a version of childhood that is rooted in the image of the child as capable, competent, and curious.

Memory and The Lost Object

In what ways do objects take on affect and substitute for memories that cannot be retrieved? As Kathy H. reconstructs her past, she depends on objects; they are the content of her screens. She has a relationship with objects in ways that demonstrate an early injury, a search for the lost object, and ambivalence towards her search and her findings. The events of her infancy are unclear but her schoolchild memories are deemed especially important. Memory in this context is a private narrative and not focused on the content of what happened but instead on what it felt like which parallels Freud's ideas in the opening quote of this chapter. The essence of an experience or the arousal of a feeling we connect to the past is actually formed in the moment when we think we are retrieving a memory. The conflicts from early experiences become active in the here and now, and current preoccupations leak out onto narratives of childhood. In this process, wishes from history are transferred onto the present and narrated as truth. Memory is then a site of doubt but also a place to justify and make claims of certainty and understanding. The internal battle between remembering and resisting seems alive in the mind of Kathy H.

Kathy H.'s questions of origin are not answered when she is a student at Hailsham. These questions expose themselves as she looks back on her past. As she constructs her childhood, the memories are combined in relationship with objects. She tells her stories with careful attention to the actual material items that hold the pieces together, for example: Tommy's favourite polo shirt in danger of being destroyed (p. 7); her own secret possession of the Judy Bridgewater tape, and its disappearance and subsequent rescue (p. 67); and Ruth's lies about a particular pencil case (p. 53). These stories rely on objects. In turn, these screen memories become Kathy H.'s lost object. In Freud's

(1899) discussion of screen memories he says, “if a certain childhood experience asserts itself in the memory, this is not because it is golden, but because it has lain beside gold” (p. 545), meaning that the details of a screen memory offer us a hint of the geography of the past and a suggestion of what might be hidden beneath.

Sales, Exchanges, and Collections

The child’s questions of origin are diverted by the orchestration of “Collections” that serve as a means to construct history, make attachments, and build relationships. The children at Hailsham have collections of objects. These collections serve as placeholders for memories and stories of childhood. Children trade materials and have sales as if to buy and sell or trade their childhood stories with ones that suit them better or fit with the narrative they have constructed about who they are and where they come from. These materials act as a grounding tool so their phantasies stay connected to the objects rather than fly away into uncharted emotional territory. This is a public construction for consumption by others: the children are engaged with each other in the process, and the guardians know that the trade of these objects exists.

Accounts of losing, finding, making, destroying, and searching for objects fill the pages of the novel. At Hailsham, the students participate in a variety of routine events related to materials (objects). They create artwork for “Exchanges” in the hope that their work might be chosen by Madame to put in the “Gallery.” At “Sales,” they used tokens to acquire materials for their “Collections.” Kathy H. explains:

I don’t know if you had ‘collections’ where you were. When you come across old students from Hailsham, you always find them, sooner or later, getting nostalgic about their collections. At the time of course, we took it for granted. You each had a wooden chest with your name on it, which you kept under your bed and filled with your possessions—the stuff you acquired from

the Sales or Exchanges. I can remember one or two students not bothering much with their collections, but most of us took enormous care, bringing things out to display, putting other things away carefully. (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 35)

These “Sales,” “Exchanges,” and “Collections” are a method of engineering and orchestrating history. For children with unknown beginnings, whether they are mysterious or forbidden, a past can *only* be constructed. At Hailsham, memories are made through creating, trading, and obtaining objects. This becomes customary and provides students a way to construct childhood narratives and inform ways of relating with others. Within the closed system of Hailsham, materials are rotated among students so that they shared common encounters with the same objects. In connection with each other, the students and the items develop a historical authenticity, or historicity. As time passes, these items generate value, and Kathy H. tells us, “by the time we were ten, this whole notion that it was a great honour to have something taken away by Madame collided with a feeling that we were losing our most marketable stuff” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 35). Madam choosing an object gives it added value. It is both a validation of the child and an affirmation of the story they have constructed for themselves. But to relinquish a prized possession to Madame means giving over a piece of history that had been earned and then losing the connections to the memories that had been constructed, creating a great dilemma. Missing, stolen, or destroyed things cause enormous anxiety, beyond the fact that these particular children had little access to the outside world, and so acquiring something new would be difficult. The loss is more significant than misplacing a precious toy. It is as if the object was the only signifier of the memory and so if the object disappears, the memory disappears as memories are built in union with objects.

Possibles and the Phantasy of the Mother

Through her narration, Kathy H. gradually helps us realize that the children of Hailsham are human clones. No details of the cloning process are recounted, but the motherless child's existence is justified through the purpose of serving others. Without having any ties to a past or a family, the children create the idea of a "possible," which is the belief that there is a person in the world who could be the original person after whom they have been cloned. Kathy H. explains the idea behind the possible theory:

Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you'd be able to find the person you were modeled from. That's why, when you were out there yourself—in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafes—you kept an eye out for "possibles"—the people who might have been the models for you and your friends. (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 127)

The "possible" is not only someone who the children can see as their model, or as a site for origin, but also someone who can prove the accuracy of their childhood stories, someone who can validate their existence. The "possible" is also closely tied to narrating and imagining the future: "One big idea behind finding your model was that when you did, you'd glimpse your future" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 127).

Never Let Me Go

In *Never Let Me Go*, the phantasy of the mother is uncovered and (re)covered in the process of using screen memories but also through *nachträglichkeit* and the narration of the novel itself. One particular object and affective story returns multiple times throughout the novel. This is the story of the Judy Bridgewater cassette tape and the song "Never Let Me Go." Kathy H. shares this story at multiple

points in her narrative, and with each time it is informed by new pieces of her experience and as well as the reader's knowledge. Kathy H. explains why this particular song was important to her:

I just waited for that bit that went: 'Baby, baby, never let me go....' And what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: 'Baby, never let me go....' (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 64)

Kathy H. describes her connection to this song as recognizing the happiness this mother feels to have an unexpected child but also the fear that she will somehow lose her baby. Upon reflection, Kathy H. indicates that she knew her interpretation was incorrect but that she listened to the song over and over again when she was alone and always with this story in mind.

Ishiguro then provides us three accounts of the same story relating to this song. Kathy H. tells us of a time when she was at Hailsham as a young child. She was alone in her room and "Never Let Me Go" was playing on the cassette tape. The music was louder than usual and she held a pillow to her chest and swayed as she sang 'Oh baby, *baby*, never let me go....' Realizing that she was not alone, she looked up to see Madame standing in the doorway, crying. Towards the end of the novel, once Kathy H. is grown and knows her fate and that of her friends, she shares her recollection with Madame. When speaking to Madame, Kathy H. admits she knew her interpretation of the song was wrong but in trying to understand why Madame had cried at the time, she says, "Maybe you read my mind, and that's why you found it so sad. I didn't think it was so sad at the time, but now, when I think back, it does feel a bit sad." (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 248). Madame's response provides a completely different perspective on this story. Madame explains:

I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go.

That is what I saw. It wasn't really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I've never forgotten. (Ishiguro, 2005, pp. 248-249)

Kathy H. narrates all three versions of this story as reflections on the event after time has passed. The tape, an object that went missing and was found again in Norfolk, acts as a critical memory stabilizer. The existence of the tape is essential to the story. The essence of Madam's remembrance speaks to the fear of letting go and sorrow for the future, and Kathy's version of the story has to do with a longing for the mother, which is exposed to and witnessed by the closest thing to a mother she ever had. The value that Kathy H. gives to the object and the song reveals why this story is so significant. Accuracy is not important, as the memory is shaped by to when and to whom it is narrated.

The Lost Phantasy of Norfolk

While it may be difficult to trace how Kathy H. developed the capacity for phantasy, we can find evidence of her ability to imagine in a place called Norfolk. In school at Hailsham, the students are taught British geography and Norfolk is mentioned time and time again but with no pictures to accompany it. Unlike other locations in the country, Miss Emily says it was "not on the way to anywhere" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 60), and so people "bypass it altogether. For that reason, it's a peaceful corner of England, rather nice. But it's also something of a lost corner" (p. 60). The term "lost corner" ignites the children's imagination, and they start to believe that all the lost objects of England are gathered together in this place. Ruth describes how even as they grew they found some comfort in believing that if something was lost it would always end up in Norfolk: a place where it could be found again (Ishiguro, 2005).

When Kathy H., Tommy, and Ruth travel to Norfolk, it is one of the only times they seek encounters in the world beyond the one that was constructed for them. Norfolk exists without carers, donors, guardians, and Hailsham. Accessing this phantasy place brings Kathy H. closer to some kind of

truth normally hidden by screen memories and constructed understandings. The hunt for the cassette tape, following the “possible,” and the idea of a “dream future” are all examples of screen memories guiding the search for the object and seeking understanding about unfathomable futures and mysterious, misplaced beginnings. When describing how real lost objects were found in Norfolk, Kathy H. says, “ we didn’t just think it pretty funny; we both felt deep down some tug, some old wish to believe again in something that was once close to our hearts” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 61). The phantasy world starts to bleed into reality.

Norfolk is described as part of the external world: a place you can drive to. But when constructed by children in the realm of imagination it becomes an attempt to recover a past, and in this logic, understand a future. It is placeholder for history, for the forgotten, and the lost. Norfolk is a location of heightened affect. It defies logic, influences time, and has the capacity to contain the loss of all of England. The children put faith in Norfolk as holder and protector of inaccessible memories and as a way to understand what they did not know. Norfolk is imagined as the place where lost items are collected but also as the keeper of “real” memories that had attached themselves to those objects. The object and the construction of stories about the object are a way for Kathy H. to symbolize by attaching meaning to objects and subsequently filling the space of loss. In *Never Let Me Go*, the students create an entire place to hold these objects and the weight of their emotional significance.

Norfolk is the potential site for self-exploration, discovery, and love; a place where you can know. Paradoxically, this “real world” becomes a site for phantasy exploration and also serves as a model of the internal or psychic reality. Norfolk is the keeper of real (yet often inaccessible) memories, similar to the unconscious. The name Norfolk itself gives us clues to its purpose and status. “Nor Folk” suggests “no people,” negating the idea that they will find anyone there and telling readers that what they are looking for in Norfolk is neither real nor retrievable. What this site offers to the imagination is

more important than the potential of finding the actual mother: it offers a space to imagine that she might actually exist. The lost corner of Norfolk is also a model for our place of phantasy. In my analysis, Ishiguro's world gets mapped onto our own. Norfolk is a place for our unconscious, where we can see our phantasy life at play. Our deep desire for something we cannot easily articulate becomes accessible when we read.

The Lost Object

To return to think with Klein and Riviere (1964) we can consider the mother to be the lost object; she equals love in the phantasy world of relationships. This means there is a lifelong quest to recover the feeling of satisfaction associated with this love. For Kathy H., there is no mother, but there remains a loss from infancy that is indescribable and cannot be recovered literally or figuratively. And while none of us, including Kathy H., remember what we lost, this loss constitutes us. The "guardians" at Hailsham divert any search for origins, and the orchestration of "Collections" serve as a means to construct history and attach to something. In *Never Let Me Go*, childhood traumas of destroying and losing objects work to disguise the urge to know or understand beginnings and essentially cover up the need to search for the lost object.

In psychoanalysis, conceptually, the object is a mental representation of the loss but stems from initially seeing the mother as an object herself. In the process of learning that the mother is more than an object, the child loses the mother, and this loss confuses the matter. The idea of the mother is later replaced by objects in a quest to try and regain her love, which is further complicated by the guilt in association with the earlier desire to kill as payback for her abandonment. The loss from infancy is then re-created in conjunction with the loss of actual items. This loss is devastating and constitutive of the ego. This attempt at reparation, or the quest for the mother, is also a quest for love and satisfaction. All of this happens at the point just prior to language. The object symbolizes love and so the object

becomes love. Through memory traces, the human has the capacity to incorporate the object and always have it. But it is never enough.

Recalling a conversation with Ruth, Kathy H. discloses: “I still had most of my old Hailsham collection box safely stowed inside my pine chest in my bedsit” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 119). When she asks if Ruth ever had a collection after Hailsham, Ruth responds: “Remember the guardians, before we left, how they kept reminding us we could take our collections with us? In the end I threw them out” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 119). Ruth also reveals to Kathy H. that she really could not bear the thought of throwing out her collections, so she secretly found a way to have her materials donated to a charity shop. She tells Kathy H., “You were different. I remember. You were never embarrassed about your collection and you kept it. I wish now I’d done that too” (p. 120). Kathy H.’s relationship with her objects *was* different. Kathy H. develops an attachment to objects as well as ambivalence towards them. As an adult, she attempts to construct memories through the use of objects, rather than use them to build history as she did in childhood. By assigning time and emotion to items, she transforms them into vital narratives. A sense of what was lost appears in the cracks of her screen memories as she tries to articulate the meaning of objects and relations through storytelling. The objects she fears losing at this point are her stories so that, eventually, her memories become her lost object. The gathering of collections is Kathy H.’s attempt to hold on to the past or create a bridge between what she thinks she knows and what she wishes to know about her past.

The Melancholia of Kathy H.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the initial loss and subsequent feeling of love experienced by the baby are complicated by the complete absence of the mother, rather than just a temporary abandonment. The lost object is not knowable and covered up by the relationships Kathy H. has with real objects. Beneath her screens, the drive to recover the object is surpassed by wanting to know what the object is. As time

passes her collections are replaced by stories and memories and eventually she is unable to place the loss anywhere but within herself. Is it then possible to understand Kathy H. as melancholic?

Freud (1917) sees melancholia to be different from mourning in that it relates to the loss of an object that is unconscious and so identifying what is troubling the melancholic is difficult to locate. As Kathy H. learns about where she comes from and her purpose in the world, there remains information she will never be able to know. This loss is bound to how she defines herself and her interiority. This loss is abstract and imaginary rather than concrete, confirming Freud's (1917) explanation of melancholic loss as "more notional in nature" (p. 312) instead of connected to an actual person or death. Notional means that the loss is seen as theoretical and speculative and so resides in the place of imagination and cannot be proven. The loss in this case assumes the form of a child in the imagination and looks like an attachment to objects in the world. Because she does not even know what she has lost, it is possible that Kathy H. is melancholic. She is unable to place the loss anywhere but in herself and her body holds the trauma of this loss.

Kathy H.'s melancholia is confused by the conflict of ambivalence. The relationship to her memories is one marked by the presence of two opposing ideas. For Kathy H., this conflict emerges in reality as both an acceptance and an avoidance of her fate. As she deflects the role of donor, her ambivalence becomes a punishment. She lingers in the role of carer and must always face her fate as she nurses the donors through to their completion. Freud (1917) describes the melancholic as one who is incapable of love and achievement. Kathy H. does not progress in relationships or in life as she is continuously escaping her transition into the role of donor and persists as a carer much longer than most. Kathy H. stalls time but in the process punishes her body and resides in her loss. This role of carer provides a consistent reminder of her inevitable "completion" and its position can be seen as a form of self-inflicted suffering, akin to suicide, as she must witness her prospective death over and over

again. In melancholia, the mysterious internal work of the mind deals with loss by mistaking the ego for an object and devouring it (Freud, 1917), and so the ego becomes empty and destitute. I wonder if it is at this time that Kathy H. turns herself into an object. This state of postponement is the only way she can retain her memories. She says, “The memories I value most, I don’t see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won’t lose my memories of them” (Ishiguro, 2005, pp. 261-262). Replayed and recounted, these memories are the quest to recover a feeling of satisfaction and love, and so she will not let them go. Perhaps she has no choice as her circumstances and status force her ambivalence.

The fact that Kathy H. cannot retrieve her beginnings is not unique. We can use her as an example of how psychoanalysis understands infancy and childhood memory in general. This means it is possible to frame how we feel towards our childhood as melancholic because our childhoods are intangible, unknowable, and notional in nature, and yet we attempt to bring them into significance through our relationship with the child.

The Mother, Distinctions, and New Ways of Reading

In reading this novel I came to a new understanding of desire. The fresh challenges presented in Ishiguro’s work confronted my thinking, making for conflict and asking for a critique of my current theories. When I was first came up against the probable failure of my own theory of the phantasies of natality, I thought I would have to let it go, but then realized it led me directly to the very thing I was struggling to think about. Reading this novel pushes against normative ideas about childhood and offers a new way to think about mothers and love. In the space of reading, the dance between phantasy and reality becomes the site for our thinking and a space of relationships. The movement between these ideas is both compelling and frustrating, but it is our recognition of this that becomes useful to us as the potential space materializes in our relationship to reading. Our reality can live differently in the novel,

and novel ideas begin to reach beyond the page, impacting our relationships. One perspective is that *Never Let Me Go* is an allegory of what we are all actually experiencing. Exploring the idea of a motherless baby and her melancholic loss is a way we can try to think about our own loss. In our world and inside the novel, these circumstances send us on a mission to recover something we do not know and something we cannot find.

Never Let Me Go gives us a child who is alone and cannot retrieve her past. Kathy H.'s psychological process is evident through her search for family and origins and the construction of narrative to fill the gap of absent memories. She places affect and significance onto objects that suggest an experience that cannot be articulated and participates in the unconscious use of screen memories (the neighbours of real experience) to preserve clues or open doors to what actually happened. This play in the unconscious also gives space to the desire she has for an alternate story. To consider our beginnings is part of the phantasy of our adult life and is coupled with our relationship to creating, thinking, and narrating stories. Our construction of narrative is an attempt to make peace with a difficult beginning, the traumatic loss that births our relationship to love, and the way we must hate and kill the mother in order to move forward and leave childhood behind. The mystery of the child we seek is also a mystery of our relationship to the idea of the mother.

Ishiguro's world seems strangely familiar, and Kathy H. is more recognizable than we might be comfortable with. If we adopt some of the ideas Klein (1958, 1959, 1964) proposes, we can see that at the time our internal structure is formed, we experience deep loss, develop love, and create phantasy but that the memories of infancy are not accessible to any of us. While she has not lost a mother in the way Klein describes, we understand that Kathy H. has experienced an indescribable loss. She identifies her loss by attaching it to objects. These objects create a place for affect and become a tool that binds her phantasies to reality. For Kathy H., her memories are recovered in phantasy through her

attachment to objects, even though she does not know what it is she has lost, or what will be taken from her. Norfolk stands in as the place of phantasy and the site of searching and hopefully recovering the lost object.

Reading allows our phantasies of natality to come alive. Narrative gives us a new but perhaps frightening place to think about the child. If love and loss are the same thing, as Klein suggests, I cannot help but think of the deep love for a child as an overwhelming fear of children disappearing, being taken away, or growing up. Also, our desire to manage the child in a particular way may be rooted in the fear that they might reveal who we truly are. However, our phantasy life gives us a second chance. Ishiguro's world is ours but not ours. It is both familiar and unfamiliar. Reading this book reveals my own transference when thinking about the image of the child and feelings associated with my mother started to fill the pages. I lost clarity of distinction between my reading, my childhood story, and my emotional relationship to my mother. The children at Hailsham are either our greatest fear or the best reflection of who we are.

Chapter Four: Beautiful Monsters, Strange Children, and the Problem of Making Distinctions

History and childhood, as ways of thinking and ways of knowing, both strenuously attempted to delimit and resist the implications of growth, and both ways of thought pushed these questions to the interior. The vast, historicised world was turned inside, so that history itself might be de-historicised, removed from the time that allowed growth and decay, so that they might be overcome, in the lost and—crucially—timeless place within (Steedman, 1994, p. 95)

Steedman (1994) complicates the way we think about the child as she presents childhood as an idea connected to our ways of conceptualizing history. Childhood, for Steedman is a way of being in the world, a form of knowledge, and a quality that adults want to possess, control, and manipulate. In this construct, childhood can be removed from ideas of time and history, and in turn growth and development, by being pushed inside so these ideas become lost in the unconscious. The process Steedman describes places our questions of childhood deep within but recognizes that they are brought to the surface both consciously and unconsciously when exposed to particular triggers. As we continuously reunite with what Meltzer (1988) calls the “aesthetic conflict”, these questions may re-emerge slowly or they can appear as dramatic eruptions.

Children, “the most temporary of all social subjects” (Steedman, 1994, p. 6), are by their very nature impossible to capture. To introduce these ideas I begin with Maurice Sendak, author of *Where the Wild Things Are* as provocation for thinking about the figure of the child. To explore this further, I have created a dialogue between Mary Shelley’s (2003) novel *Frankenstein* and Carolyn Steedman’s (1994) discussion of the elusive history of child acrobats in *Strange Dislocations*. The narrative of Frankenstein’s monster is considered in contrast to Shelley’s ideas about childhood, hoping to animate tensions in her mythology. I also see the monster as a representation of the child, who then comes to represent childhood and exists as a figure beyond the page. The way that we invest in child figures is also deeply rooted in our emotional histories and transfers onto our relationships with actual children. Steedman’s work acts as a tool to support the complicated process of thinking about a child figure and

its manifestation and purpose. This conflict makes itself known through the difficulty adults have in perceiving difference among real children, historical children, and figurative ones. This conflict creates a collapse in our ideas of time and posits the child simultaneously as our past, a current concern, and a potential future. The most pressing problems that arise from this collection of ideas are: Why would we want to push the child inside? And when the idea of the child is activated, yet again through our encounters with the “aesthetic conflict”, why does the child resurface in a completely different form and without distinctions? The method of thinking that Steedman demands of us is partially built on exploring places inside that we cannot easily access and requires us to make distinctions between, in, and around the very things that challenge us to differentiate. De-historicizing allows the idea of the child to be influenced by adult phantasy rather than linked to truth, accuracy, and authenticity.

Sendak’s Kids

The loss of our childhood is a traumatic experience, and the longing we have for the child is something we unconsciously work to recover or repair throughout our adult lives. In Klein’s (1959) paper “Our adult world and its roots in infancy” she reminds us that “both the capacity to love and the sense of persecution have deep roots in the infant’s earliest mental processes” (p. 249) and reinforces that:

love and hate towards the mother are bound up with the very young infant’s capacity to project all his emotions on to her, thereby making her into a good as well as dangerous object.

However, introjection and projection though they are rooted in infancy, are not only infantile processes. (p. 250)

Klein’s paper helps us understand that the development of phantasy and the sculpting of the child’s understanding of the world begin in infancy, but the process of introjection and projection, a dance between internal and external factors, continues throughout life.

These phantasies of natality remain buried deep within but are enacted symbolically in our play, our imagination, and our neuroses. If our concepts of childhood are repressed and almost hidden from our conscious daily functioning, they still remain a force that guides our thinking about childhood, informs our constructions of the child, and impacts how we engage with actual children. While playing with these ideas, I thought of Maurice Sendak's famous children's picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*. I remember this story from my childhood, as well as its significance when I was studying to become an Early Childhood Educator and practicing the art of storytelling. This storybook and Sendak himself seem to stimulate the phantasies of childhood for adults who remember reading his books when they were little and many of who now force these classics on their own children. In 2010 and 2011, Sendak, a rarely interviewed recluse, did a number of interviews, presumably to promote his final children's storybook, *Bumble-Ardy*. A photo essay and story appeared on NPR, he was the reluctant star of an article in the Guardian newspaper, and, in 2010, Stephen Colbert conducted an interview with Sendak that aired on the Colbert Report. Intrigued by how intensely people responded to these interviews and articles, I began to think about Sendak and how his newfound presence in print and online stirred up energy and conversation about childhood and its construction, even though most listeners and readers had not thought of him or read his stories for years.

Sendak's stories are filled with lost children, inadequate parents and strange creatures, and he revisits these themes throughout his work. While a child, Sendak was exposed to trauma and ideas of death due to the loss of members of his extended family during the Holocaust. His depictions of children can be easily interpreted as having a direct root in his own childhood. Similar ideas of how childhood experiences make us the adult we become are presented throughout Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where childhood stories are used to explain the life of the adult and their many mistakes. However, this deterministic reading is far too simple and limits us in understanding the layers of

emotion that are wrapped up in the ways we construct and re-tell the narratives of childhood. Perhaps this simplification emphasizes the challenges we have in making distinctions between critical concepts when we are faced with our own loss.

With my own burgeoning interest in the image of the child and a wish to explore it as a construction partnered with feelings of loss, I initially wondered what Sendak was thinking when he created the world of Max's imagination and filled it with monsters. I was quick to identify Sendak's most well-known book *Where the Wild Things Are* as a metaphor for the depths of our imagination and the phantasies of childhood. It pleases me to imagine I was the kind of child who wanted to be wild but who turned out okay because I could find my way back into the secure arms of my mother's love. A 2011 article in the Guardian newspaper describes how "Sendak will always be young, a proxy for Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*, who runs away from his mother's anger into the consoling realm of his own imagination. There are monsters in there, but Max faces them down before returning to his mother for reconciliation and dinner" (Brookes, para 8). Our analysis becomes more challenging if we reframe Brookes' interpretation and consider the monsters as an incarnation of Max's phantasies of the self. Max does not defeat the monsters but incorporates them and returns to his mother more monstrous than he was before. It is easy for us to understand this world of monsters as an expression of the child's frustration with the pressures of the adult world. Or, more interestingly, we can read it as a Kleinian tale of a beastly child who attempts to symbolically destroy the mother in order to become a free and separate subject.

My process of writing about difficult ideas buried deep inside our representations of childhood was complicated by Sendak's passing on May 8, 2012. I witnessed a dramatic outpouring of grief in the news and on social media. Perhaps this reaction was partly due to the series of interviews that appeared in the few years prior to his death. We had been reminded of Sendak; he was on our minds and this

seemed to matter. Yet, I believe there was something deeper, something beyond this superficial expression of loss. He had re-opened a point of access to our past. The beloved children's author, who wrote about childhood and for children, was a controversial character and a strange, reclusive man. His stories contained mischievous children, naked protagonists, and wild things and he presented childhood as a difficult and potentially terrifying experience. Criticism of him and his work were fueled by societal anxiety about children needing protection, which really was a screen for a defense of homophobia. Sendak was also grumpy, a self-proclaimed atheist and someone who kept secrets from his parents. He was a rebel in the world of children's literature and his image holds power to remind us of alternate ways to think about children and, in turn, to think about ourselves. For this reason, in this chapter, I discuss Sendak as an example of a child figure. Though not explicitly thought of as a child by the reading public, Sendak becomes a child figure in the mind of his readers once informed by our constructions and phantasies of childhood. The more I think about Sendak, the harder he pushes at my questions of why we would want to force the idea of the child inside and hold it there. Is it to limit growth, decay, and change in an attempt to find or recover what we lost so long ago? And why, when through encounters with the "aesthetic conflict", does the phantasy of the child take on new forms and further our confusion?

The Figure of the Child and its Strange Dislocations

Steedman (1994) provides a method to probe these particular questions of the child. She uses Goethe's child figure Mignon to explore ideas of childhood and interiority in *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930*. She emphasizes that the imagination is concerned with the beliefs, fantasies, and desires of the adult and is expressed through the figure of the child. In Goethe's work, the child-figure Mignon is an acrobat, deformed by adult hands to enable her performance. The strange, androgynous, incomplete, and little child that Goethe wrote was and is

reproduced in countless versions over time. But Steedman is more concerned with the ideas, beliefs, and conceptualizations that were involved in remembering and reshaping this literary figure long after it was written. The ideas of childhood that Mignon embodied meant something, even to those who had never read Goethe's work.

In the case of Mignon, the child figure is a strange, alluring mystery, a monstrous, misunderstood creature, or a variety of fantasies in between. Adults relish in the fascination inspired by a tiny child who attempts to participate in a grown up world, as Steedman (1994) notes: "What is 'priceless' in the child's performance is its attempt to be part of the adult world, and the very uselessness of that attempt" (p. 144). According to Steedman, the size and shape of children's bodies, knowledge and capabilities in contrast to that of the adult—fuel ideas of sentimentality. The child's littleness makes the figure accessible, easy to manipulate and understand. Steedman explains that "much of the claim for Mignon's importance is to do with the attention the figure draws to *littleness*, to the visceral sense of the smallness of the self that lies inside" (1994, p. 9).

There is a sense of intrigue in watching children work, embodying the qualities and movements of both adults and children at the same time. In *Strange Dislocations*, the child's work is that of the acrobat, street performer, and actor. In other spaces the child's work is that of play. The voyeuristic investment in children's labour transforms it into performance. The child-as-performer provides easy access for surveillance and capture and is also a comfort to the spectator. Steedman (1994) states: "The child on display watched by adults encourages the formation of a collection of concepts and understandings about children's bodies" (p. 94).

In *Strange Dislocations*, Steedman presents us with a way to think about how we use the image of the child as more than an emotional site for our phantasies. I relate this to what Rose (1984) describes as a desire for the child. The desire Rose speaks of is not an action but an investment in a

particular idea. This investment transforms into something we can utilize. The child as a device helps us function with the masked emotions of our childhood, and the personification of child figure is one way in which we do this. Steedman (1994) describes the difference between metaphor and personification by explaining that metaphor lives in the world of resemblances and symbols.

Alternatively, personification creates a disruption between the entity and the meaning it has been given, and something in this space escapes knowing. So, even those who did not know her in her original form put Mignon to use with little regard for her historical development. Steedman explains that Mignon:

was used for the purposes of personification, to give a name and a face (and a body: a deformed and damaged body) to abstract ideas and bodies of theories, particularly theories of childhood and development. (p. 19)

This object or figure is incomplete but open to be created. While a place to explore the emotions of the unconscious phantasies of childhood is necessary, we also seem to require a way to translate these things into something we deem as useful in the world. The child as a figure is enigmatic and serves as both an emotional site for phantasies and as a place to turn phantasies into action.

Steedman suggests that child figures and ideas of childhood are generally used to express the deep-rooted historicity that is fundamentally linked to us as individual subjects. The theme of newness, fragility & the body makes itself present here as the figure of the child (housed in the body of the child) can be shaped through the process of construction. The personification of the figure is alive with drama and emotion and opens up the problem of a misplaced past and allows us to see subjectivity at play. Here constructions are built, torn apart, and invested with meaning. The child's body becomes the site for manipulation as we destruct, redesign and rebuild the child to suit our needs. To conceive the problems of development and mortality as belonging to children, children become the problem they

were formerly used to express, and the child figure provides people with a method to think about constructing the self.

The Problem of Making Distinctions

Steedman (1994) asks us to make distinctions or discriminate between things as different. We often have difficulty making distinctions and instead collapse concepts together as a method of coping with anxiety. As noted in chapter one, Arendt (1971) sees thinking as the human condition but names the problem of thinking as the challenge of making distinctions. Arendt advises us to keep distinctions clear rather than let them collapse. When we collapse concepts they start to lose their meaning, but, at the same time, they create deep reservoirs that hold the pieces of what were once whole ideas. This challenge is seen in our difficulty in knowing the difference between the child as real, historical, literary, or imaginary. This challenge is also made evident as dimensions of time become distorted, and we combine the past, present and future. Additionally, when reading and writing about representations of childhood, it is easy to blur the lines between actual experience, narrative, and our phantasies. This constitutes a problem, particularly for humans in the state of childhood, but also for the adults performing the projection. The means by which children have come to be closely identified with our adult self-hood requires us to consider the role of projection onto identifications with children. And while distinctions matter, there is also something we gain when they become muddled and unclear. This is a manifestation of deferred action or *nachträglichkeit* action in two ways. The first is the way in which something from the past is revived in the present and the second is an interchange between future and past with reflection on what was before but stimulated by current understanding. All of this calls for consideration of what is not known at the beginning or again later on. The figure of the child in the mind of the adult is a supplementary construction that is projected back. The image of the child,

which is generated through our collapse of concepts and lack of distinctions, becomes the way in which we understand ourselves. In this confusion, we reassign meaning and affect.

Frankenstein

When I first started thinking about the concept of childhood, its misrecognition, and the place for the monstrous child, I was reading Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. My initial curiosities about the book were related to how Shelley constructs childhood and how children are portrayed in the novel. The concept of childhood was exceptionally new when Shelley's *Frankenstein* was first published in 1818. While not explicitly defined in her novel, the concept pervades the text, providing a framework that continually strives to explain how characters arrive in their adult predicaments.

In *Frankenstein*, the problems housed within concepts like creation, family, education, literacy, science, and human nature are tangible and ready for analysis. However, these themes can only be examined if one considers the carefully chosen details of each character's childhood. The mythology of childhood constructed in *Frankenstein* focuses on confirming certainties about children and human development. The novel presents children as objects and assumes that the lives of people can be determined based on the absence or presence of childhood essentials. In general, children are characterized in opposition to adults and Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* does exactly this. Depictions of the early years of Captain Walton, Victor, his mother Caroline, and Elizabeth serve to construct a mythology of childhood that separates children from adults and suggests universal truths about the child. Considering the monster along with ideas of natality and loss disrupts this theory of determinism and highlight tensions in Shelley's representations and her mythology. Shelley's construction of childhood is also possibly infused with elements of her own childhood experiences. Mary Shelley was the child of celebrated and radical writers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft and with that perhaps came the assumption it would be natural for her to write as well. Her mother died tragically of

puerperal poisoning that was contracted following Shelley's birth; implicating Shelley in the loss of her mother. Shelley's childhood was devoid of a nurturing maternal figure but filled with intellectual pursuits. Themes of birth, death and education filled Shelley's life and also occupy her novel *Frankenstein*.

Shelley's Childhood

Shelley's construction of childhood requires that we think about the language used to describe childhood, the difference between childhood and adulthood, and what children require or need. Shelley's way of thinking also uncovers new areas to explore including the child/adult dichotomy, parental expression of love and responsibility, the need for child protection and rescue, and childhood as a predictor of the future.

In *Frankenstein*, childhood is placed in opposition to adulthood. This dualism equates childhood with innocence, vulnerability, and the need for protection, while adulthood is associated with responsibility, independence, and guilt. The description of the ideal child focuses on a combination of beauty and innocence. Victor remembers Elizabeth as "a child fairer than a pictured cherub—a creature who seemed to shed radiance from her looks and whose form and motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills" (Shelley, 2003, p. 36). William is described as a "sweet child whose smiles delighted" and who possessed "such radiant innocence" (Shelley, 2003, p. 75). Even the monster's perspective of William confirms this ideal when he tells of a "beautiful child" "with all the sportiveness of infancy" (Shelley, 2003, p. 144). The monster believes that William would be "unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity" (p. 144). The pastimes of children are considered implicitly immature and Victor articulates his own difference when he describes how his childhood passions "were turned not towards childish pursuits but to an eager desire to learn" (Shelley,

2003, p. 39). Here he places child's play in juxtaposition to learning, inferring the importance of the latter.

Shelley also divides children into two types: children of privilege and children who are destitute. Victor recognizes his own privilege, for when he “mingled with other families, [he] distinctly discerned how peculiarly fortunate [his] lot was and gratitude assisted the development of filial love” (Shelley, 2003, p. 39). It is also assumed that parents feel a natural responsibility towards their creations that is expressed in love. Victor connects his incomparably happy childhood to his parents being “possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence” (Shelley, 2003, p. 39) concerning him. He believes that his parents’ “deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both” (Shelley, 2003, p. 35). Caroline remembers finding Elizabeth and how she was the child that “attracted [her] far above all the rest. She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed vagrants; this child was thin and very fair” (Shelley, 2003, p. 36). And so, a particular kind of beauty rescues Elizabeth and this allows her a life of privilege. However, innocence is lost one way or another, either by growing up or by being destroyed. These stories feed the emotions that inform our image of the child.

Frankenstein tells us that children who meet unfortunate circumstances are in danger of becoming “orphans and beggars” unless they are rescued. In the novel, beauty and charm are the liberators. All characters are assumed to be the product of their histories, with their early years determining what kind of adults they will be. Their experiences, dreams, interests, and understandings of childhood are manifested in their adult lives. Captain Walton writes to his sister from his ship, describing how his expedition “has been the favourite dream of [his] early years” (Shelley, 2003, p. 16). Victor's mother Caroline was rescued as a child and as an adult helped the less fortunate, which is described as “more than a duty; it was a necessity, a passion—remembering what she had suffered, and

how she had been relieved—for her to act in her turn the guardian angel of the afflicted” (Shelley, 2003, p. 35). Even with all the love he received, Victor tells of a day that determined his fate and sent him on the path to his great mistake. On this day he witnessed “a most violent and terrible thunderstorm” (Shelley, 2003, p. 42) and became acquainted with the laws of electricity. This was the beginning of his path to destruction. Victor says, “strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin” (Shelley, 2003, p. 43). According to Shelley, a moment, an experience, or an environment from our childhood can govern the future. These stories we tell ourselves about our childhoods help us justify a difficult past and reconcile with the events of the present. But these stories are not facts, they are narrative that is constructed to confirm affect and can be justified only based on what we know now.

So while *Frankenstein* seems to promote a determinist view of childhood, where the events and conditions of the child are seen to decide the future of the adult, in fact, the novel shows us that we all construct narratives of our childhood in adulthood. In this way, we can see that childhood is less about determinism and more about experimenting with temporality and dimensions of time. Releasing the child from the confines of time is a radical act. In this space we find a child that does not easily follow the path of development. This child offers something different. The child is an enigma, an unpredictable creature, not one we can control or define. In other words, a beautiful monster is the imaginary child.

(Not) a Novel Childhood

Frankenstein’s monster discovers the concept of family and learns of human hardship, acquires language and then learns to read because of his hunger and search for food that leads him to hide in a hovel beside a cottage in the woods. In this position, hungry and alone, he realizes he can observe a family through a small crack in their cottage wall. As he watches and listens throughout the winter

months he gains the ability to speak and develops affection towards his unknowing teachers. When the family must teach a guest to read the monster also benefits from these lessons. However, learning to speak, to read and to feel affection is accompanied by seeing his own reflection and discovering his identity right at the time he is attempting to create it. The monster's hunger becomes love, but his enlightenment and newfound knowledge comes with a price. The needs of his body, his naivety and eventually his surrender to gratification make room for recognition of his loss.

When Frankenstein's monster becomes literate, it is implied that he makes the shift from childhood to adulthood. At this time, he is finally able to reflect on his own circumstances, but he still requires phantasy in order to narrate his past. He describes the "agony that these reflections inflicted" (Shelley, 2003, p. 123) and how he wished he could have "forever remained in [his] native wood nor known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst and heat!" (Shelley, 2003, p. 123). His early days, devoid of self-reflection and personal knowledge, can be perceived as uncomplicated and simple. Once the monster learns the lessons of the world, he reflects:

But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? (Shelley, 2003, p. 124)

With the capacity for self-reflection and analysis provided by his education, he recognizes the significance of loving responsible parents, his otherness, and that he is somehow defective. The monster is a motherless child, who holds an inexplicable relation to his loss. As he looks back on his past, it is inevitable that his narrative of childhood is constructed with this grown-up knowledge in

mind and he resents the betrayal of his body. This can be understood as what Britzman & Pitt (2004) describe as a mistiming of learning where an experience produces a crisis that generates learning. Time and knowledge provide the possibility of understanding and then meaning can be made. The monster's narrative is a type of deferred action as he desires what he believes was childhood innocence. However, this can only be articulated as a reflection of his past and constructed through his task of memory building and filled with the affect of his current desire.

Considering the monster's narrative in contrast to Shelley's ideas about childhood exposes the weakness in her depiction of social mythology and offers something else. *Frankenstein* was the first book I read where I truly realized it was possible to think about the child as something beyond my own beliefs or concepts of childhood. The monster sits on the periphery of Shelley's theory, defined as neither adult nor child. So what does his construction represent in relation to the myth of the child? What distinctions have collapsed in the wake of his representation? He follows child-like patterns of development, grows into maturity, and expresses things that reflect human needs and wants. Conceivably, we can consider him a construction of the "Other" where the author and the reader do not know or understand his identity and experience. More interestingly, once I was able to see the monster as a personification of the child figure, I was also able to grasp the enigmatic qualities of childhood that mobilize adults in our constructions.

The Child: a Figure, an Enigmatic Object, Monster

To think of the monster as a representation of the child initially raises questions about our resistance to the otherness of childhood, which is different than thinking of the child as a monster. Frankenstein's monster is large, cumbersome, destructive, ugly, and lonely. He is made from dead parts. This image of the child is not as palatable as Shelly's or as ours. The monster is without origin and the creation of someone's obsession. He has no history, no family, and no future. The story of the

monster shows us how we can look at people as subjects and authors of their childhood histories rather than products of their pasts, providing us a more complex line of thinking than determinism by creating space for the monster in childhood and giving value to the experience of children. Yet, even then, there remains something more puzzling. Eventually, my ideas collided with the text to create a new kind of exploration as I read the work of Carolyn Steedman (1994).

The child of fascination in Steedman's work is invested with an abundance of adult anxiety, revealing a longing for the characteristics, bodies, and phantasies that belong to childhood. Figures like Goethe's Mignon are a combination of childhood qualities that animate adult protection and reflect desire for the child. At the same time, this figure is infused with something more bewildering.

Turning to Freud, Steedman (1994) describes how childhood is

a cluster of desires, happenings, experiences, assaults and traumas [that] is relocated, put into another place—a place that for the moment we only need to label as not the conscious mind, under the sway of a radically different form of time. (p. 88)

The fascination with the inner world of the child acts as an antidote for lost memories and inability to consciously access the emotional experience of the past. In other words, our phantasies of natality are expressed in this desire to know the child and highlight the strained emotional relationship between the adult and the child.

The Figure of the Child

Steedman demands that distinctions be made. Yet, how can we think with Steedman if we cannot do what she asks of us? Perhaps it is because we cannot make distinctions that we are even able to contemplate her idea. The move from literature into concepts is a complicated process, where an understanding of the figure of the child becomes necessary. A figurative child is metaphorical, resembles the actual child, and includes the act of forming something into a particular shape and

representing it through symbolization that holds ideas of the child together in some kind of container. This figurative child, just like a literary child, can be used to revolt against actual experience. The child is used as a receptacle and a stage, where both resentment and wishes are acted out, stored, and explored. Figures of childhood move and transform across time, genres, forms of writing, and cultures, where they are altered according to new understandings and then begin to stand in for actual children. Possessed with enigmatic qualities (e.g., mystery, obscurity, and contradictions) and confusing to the observer, these figures are both enchanting and a source of speculation. The child figure represents the adult's desire for the child and, as Rose (1984) distinguishes this desire is not action but investment. This investment is an emotional one. The child as an enigmatic object becomes a place to house the affect of our experience, the arousal of our emotions, and the unfulfilled wishes we have constructed about the past. The figure of the child born out of a union of history, real life experience, psychoanalytic and philosophical theory, and literature can offer compelling and perplexing images, but, as we leave the world of literature, we take this figure with us and in many ways it is a summation of our anxieties, wishes, and regrets. This aesthetic transforms into a figure and is compelled to exist beyond the page.

Steedman (1994) describes how the very transient nature of the child as subject makes the return of the past an unattainable quest, and confirms the impossibility of detaining and questioning the child. This is a conversation about time. Natality is fleeting and the moment of birth is instantly overtaken by growth. The wish that the child is knowable moves onto the body of the child and creates a figure. The figure that we presume or want to know is made small, helpless and, in turn, accessible. Steedman discusses how, in general, the child's development becomes linked to death as it irrefutably moves the child away from natality and towards aging and ultimately dying. Shelley's *Frankenstein* gives us a rendition of this connection between development and death and by framing each childhood

experience as something that has consequence for the adult they will become and so each move the child makes propels them into their future. Mortality is a problem for the adult, and the figure of the child has the ability to represent this. In this configuration, adults' wish to identify with the child is obstructed and so highlights why the figurative child, a child without a past, becomes important. We can see this in Steedman's (1994) discussion of Mignon, who is "at the point of existence—she did not have a history" (p. 40). The child without beginnings is divorced from a past, a developmental trajectory, and a future. This is a child we can make use of—one that embodies fragility and indestructibility at the same time. This child can remain forever new: if the child can be frozen in time it will not develop or move towards death; she is caught and can be known. This act of preservation, a distortion of time, is an emotional act, rooted in unconscious loss and its phantasies. It reflects our phantasies of natality and is present not only in the construction of the figure but through the narrative that accompanies it. Narrative, in both oral tradition and written works, reinforces the mythology of the child and keeps the investment in the figure alive. Once held in time, the figure becomes a container for truths and understandings about the child. Ideas of childhood as narrations of our wishes are then placed onto others. We read ourselves and our ideas of childhood onto the world, and this has the power to restore our relationship to the world, making it safe and securing our place in it (Rose, 1984). This is reminiscent of Arendt's idea that the child provides us with a second chance just as the world wears out. However, at the same time the child who is preserved remains in a state of natality and does not threaten or remind us of our loss.

The reasons we attach to figures like Sendak, feel empathy for Frankenstein's monster, and are mesmerized by Mignon as she translates across time is because we collapse concepts and lose distinctions as the result of a devastating loss. Our constructions of the child, now distorted into figurations, become useful to us.

Monsters in Childhood

Sendak, the figure, acts as a placeholder for the phantasies of childhood that belong to many adults who read his books when they were little. As we attach wishes and desires to Sendak, our distinctions are lost between the writer, the story, the image and our past. We find him strangely curious, unlikely, and satisfying. The fact that he was rarely seen or heard appears to amplify his capacity to know. The image of the child and our childhood wishes are absorbed into the figure that we use to manage and represent them.

Frankenstein's monster, or Frankenstein as we often call him, has been used, misnamed, and misunderstood by many, including those who have never read Shelley's book. If we see him as a representation of childhood, he is not merely an alternate version of the myth of childhood as a state of innocence. Frankenstein's monster becomes Frankenstein the figure who exists beyond the novel but is disconnected from his context and story. He is brought to life in multiple ways and we are left with contradictory images. He is a monstrous, awkward, and incomplete child who makes us uncomfortable, and he is not easy to love. He is sad, destructive, and vengeful, and then feeds our desire to save, fix, and educate the child. He carries the burden of his monstrosity but is also weighed down by our problem of the monstrous other in childhood. The monster transforms from monstrous literary creation to a representation of childhood, then into a figure of childhood who lives outside the novel and is used in our pursuit of knowing the child. Clearly, we become confused about who he is as he inhabits multiple roles at the same time. The monster acts as a container for our stress and anxiety so that we can simultaneously construct an image of the competent, capable, and beautiful child.

Perhaps Frankenstein's monster is just as mesmerizing as Goethe's Mignon because he was never a child. He may be the personification of our fears of creation, our apprehension towards the motherless child, our misunderstanding of a child who does not fit, and of our wishes for our

relationships with children. He is a child we cannot place but also a vessel capable of holding our wishes, anxieties, and anti-theories about childhood. Figures like Mignon and the monster are a combination of childhood qualities that animate adult protection and reflect desire and investment in the child. Neither Frankenstein or Mignon were ever a complete story; instead, they are devices. Traces of stories accompany Mignon, and she was wished into a narrative. We attach Victor's childhood to the monster as if they are one in the same. In this way the child becomes a container for emotional moments and fragments of history in search of a home. The child may also serve our needs for working through grief and unfulfilled wishes for our childhood but is still not directly reflective of our loss. This child who is preserved in time is also preserved in size and knowledge. The relationship between the adult and the child is rooted in an obvious physical otherness but also a sameness found in their histories of natality. While Frankenstein is not little, his feelings of confusion and loneliness enable him to embody littleness and inspire our sentimentality. This delight in littleness is related to accessibility to the child and an ease of manipulation. Sendak, too, transports us back to our own feeling of littleness and opens a door to our past.

In *Frankenstein*, the monster works to learn to talk and read in an effort to perform as adult, as human, and as loveable. At once, the child figure is familiar (providing a place to locate meaning and sameness) and bizarre, as it bears the burden of its oddness through an aestheticized physiology, sexual ambiguity, public embarrassment, and positioning as an object of charity and manipulation. The construction of child-as-performer removes certain qualities of childhood and interferes with understandings about children's bodies and capabilities. Performance, in another sense, is what the child does for our loss and in our phantasies. I read the figure of Sendak as a performance of our own childhood. The figure of Sendak is an attempt to watch ourselves. Our attachment to him, his books,

and illustrations are bound to our past and encourage us to think that we can recover what was lost. In this instance, the child performs both our grief and our desire.

To watch children is another act of preservation in both size and time. In early childhood education the documentation of children's play becomes an observable collection or survey of their development and learning. We watch children as they gain skill and competence as they play the role of adult while still embodying littleness, uncertainty, and vulnerability. The figure becomes suspended in time and fixed in qualities. Steedman (1994) describes the act of watching the child as a method for stalling development and stopping the movement towards a feared yet inevitable death. This pause allows us to indulge in our phantasy but also explore the affect without the usual anxiety. This obsession with observing children is partially the adults' way of dealing with mortality through forming something into a shape to fit particular desires; creating a device that can be put to use.

To Make or Not to Make Distinctions

Steedman (1994) recognizes that it is difficult to distinguish between historical, literary, and real children and shows that as all these ideas collapse, our images become reality. Yet, she asks us to make this analytic separation so that we can identify the difference between "real children and the ideational and figurative force of their existence" (Steedman, 1994, p. 5). She describes this process of making distinctions, as we separate the real child from the figure of the child, as a cognitive dislocation and clearly expresses the difficulties of achieving this, as everyone is implicated by their history. Achieving this separating is the very thing that is almost impossible for us, due to our history of being a baby, our loss of childhood omnipotence, and our search for a lost object that we can never recover.

We read ourselves and our ideas of childhood onto the world, and yet, despite this, there is something we still cannot know. The struggle between knowing and not-knowing is demonstrated by our belief in the possibility of recovering lost knowledge. From the position of looking back, we make

claims of authority and understanding, especially in relation to children. Our desire to capture and know the child turns into a form of investment in childhood and a construction of a child that we can believe in. Frankenstein tells us that education, self-realization and knowing come at a cost. As the child discovers language, grows up and becomes literate they are estranged from their own natality. The thinking that develops through this chapter pushes harder against the notion that memory is not truth and neither is knowledge. That what we know is often re-imagined.

I phantasize Sendak as a child figure. His crass, honest, and fantastical portrayal of childhood gives us a figure of the child that many of us want to believe we were. This figure represents the way we wished adults talked to us and the phantasies we think were ours. Mignon is the ultimate desirable child. She is stalled in time, performing for our pleasure, capable, confident and still easy to manipulate. In this space, we can use her to unconsciously create the self. Frankenstein embodies our fears and anxiety about a monstrous creation, but places them all together to engage our emotions and then make room for a more agreeable construction of the child.

The theme of newness, fragility and the body is evident as the size of the child accentuates her use in our phantasy. Littleness, both literal and figurative, can fit inside, be accessed, and therefore be known. Littleness also moves the adult into sentimentality. The methods adults use to adjust, change, re-imaging and manipulate the body of the child to suit our needs and desires are similar to development and use of Mignon. Also of note, is the curious way that adult bodies can represent our ideas of the child as evident in the case of Sendak and in Frankenstein's monster. The figure of the child acts as a container to hold both what we know and what we don't know about the phantasies from our own natality and the phantasies we have about natality. The child's body performs for the pleasure of others but also in order to develop the self.

The loss of natality, the fragile historical facts of our past, and the relationship with our mother all require a site for mourning. This child also provides a place that invites the interchange of our stories and our perceptions. In order to tolerate change and the uncertainty of meeting a child we do not know, we need new concepts. This does not simply mean a destruction of the Other or recognition of our past but something else entirely. It is a complete change of narrative and demands elasticity and flexibility in our thinking. To move childhood beyond the child means positioning the child as an enigmatic object, a site for projections, a placeholder for wishes, dreams, regrets, anxieties, and a possible representation of forgetting and loss.

The Child Inside

Steedman (1994) frames both childhood and history as ways of knowing and thinking. Both ideas are seen as resistant to growth and so have pushed their very questions inside:

The modern self is imagined as being *inside*, and it is this spatial sense that the term ‘interiority’ seeks to describe: the self *within*, created by the laying down and accretion of our own childhood experience, our own history, in a place inside. (Steedman, 1994, p. 12)

Inside is where history can be separated from time and can avoid crumbling away. Time can essentially be defeated in the timeless space inside the self. Steedman suggests that child figures and ideas of childhood are generally used to express the deep-rooted historicity that is fundamentally linked to individual subjects. The personification of the figure is alive with drama and emotion and opens up the problem of a misplaced past and allows us to see subjectivity at play. Here constructions are built, torn apart, and invested with meaning. In order to conceive the problems of development and mortality as belonging to children, children become the problem they were formerly used to express. In the personified child figure, there is “something grasped and understood: a shape, moving in the body . . . something inside: an *interiority*” (Steedman, 1994, p. 20).

The child figure represents history and so makes childhood equivalent to history. It holds the historicity of the subject who constructs it. The trauma of losing natality and the completion of actual childhood are the things that force history and childhood inside. These entities are broken into fragments and preserved as traces of memory and affect and held deep within the self. This past is made small and is disguised and housed away but continues to exist, preserved and distorted inside the self. The figure of the child, personified and filled with enigmatic qualities, becomes a method for the adult to believe they are connecting to the past. The child-as-enigmatic can invite us into a transitional space of creative play where distinctions between the imaginative and the actual child can be made, as symbols are recognized and played with. But due to our challenge with making distinctions, the risk is that the actual child may collapse into the adult's projection.

Chapter Five: Courage, Imagination and the Interminable Child

It is one thing to dance as though nothing has happened; it is another to acknowledge that something singularly awful has happened – the collapse of happenings – and then decide to dance. (Lear, 2006, p.153)

When I started this work I was provoked to think differently by reading Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope*. In earlier drafts of my writing *Radical Hope* appeared throughout the dissertation in an enigmatic sort of way. To think again with Lear (2006) reinforces the significance of the enigmatic object and motivates curiosity to ask if the concepts we use to make sense of childhood have lost their intelligibility. As time passes, we lose our newness and our ideas wear out. This means our symbols, representations and understandings may no longer be operative. The attempt to hold on to concepts from or of childhood, even when the myth is collapsing, is an example of the nostalgic evasion Lear refers to. However, if we are able to acknowledge that there is something we don't know, and recognize that we are impacted by the phantasies of natality then it may be possible to allow for difference in the way we imagine the child and then we might call this 'courage'. What kind of courage belongs to reading? How does our experience with literature allow us to expose our phantasies of natality and the deep desires we have for children and for ourselves? How does literature introduce us to an enigmatic child that rebirths our imaginative capacity? What might this mean for early childhood educators?

In this final chapter, I reconsider my initial questions of the image of the child, love and loss, and the phantasies of natality by summarizing the persistent elements of the four themes and their intersections that give rise to tension and new thinking. I reflect on the collective understanding that my reading of the novels *Annie John*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Frankenstein* have generated. I also ask how this study has the potential to influence the field of educating early childhood educators and the anxiety this provokes. Ultimately, the conclusion in this chapter is a space to wonder about the relationship

between reading and natality and how an experience with literature offers possibility to the imagination to encounter a different kind of child.

Rethinking the Child

To think of the child as a device and to consider our problem with making distinctions motivates a return to Lear's (2006) discussion of both enigmatic objects and nostalgic evasion. In *Radical Hope*, Lear (2006) delves into a philosophical and ethical inquiry about how we face the possibility of our own cultural devastation. Working with Lear's (2006) ideas, I wonder if the concepts that we use to make sense of childhood have lost their intelligibility. If the symbols, representations, and understandings of childhood are no longer useful as soon as we start to grow up then what do we do when we can no longer project these forward? What is left? The narratives we currently use to think about childhood can be read as Lear's (2006) concept of nostalgic evasion (p.97): an avoidance of recognizing our own history of newness or our wishes for our past, and a misrecognition of regrets and wants. Childhood cannot be fixed, revisited, or reclaimed. Childhood can never be what it was before. Historical facts are fragile and as we recapitulate what we thought has already happened, we change its meaning. Once again, the notion of deferred action is revealed as the past is woven into the present to revise the past, but remains trapped by its own phantasies. The phantasies impact the current scene as they are altered and then projected onto the present. Considering childhood as a ghost, a monster, or a fabrication bonded to our biographies frames it as revolt against the currency of our experience. It is easier to stall the child in time if they do not belong to time at all. Lear (2006) gives us space for dreams, and the child-as-enigmatic mobilizes the imagination to reflect on our experience with loss. The courage to create a novel version of the child, in light of our experience with natality, may provide a unique way to cope with and think about the phantasies of natality, the challenges in making

distinctions, and the relevance of infantile amnesia to how we construct children and subsequently make mothers. All of this seeps into the work of early childhood education.

Courage in the Face of Loss

According to Lear (2006) "courage is the capacity for living well with the risks that inevitably attend human existence" (p. 121). Lear frames courage as a virtue, "because it is an excellent way of coping with, responding to, and manifesting a basic fact about us: that we are finite erotic creatures" (p. 120) and recognizes that we take risks just by being in the world. For Lear, the task of subjectivity is never-ending as we are presented with challenges and meet new possibilities. The concepts we use to understand the world are vulnerable, and the greatest threat we face is the loss of these concepts. How does one live with conceptual loss and assault on subjectivity? Is it possible to even imagine this? If "courage is a state of character that is manifested in a committed form of living" (Lear, 2006, p. 65) how when confronted with the impenetrable concepts of an alien culture, can anything be recognized as courageous? Lear (2006) wonders if there is:

a certain plasticity deeply embedded in a culture's thick conception of courage? That is, are there ways in which a person brought up in a culture's traditional understanding of courage might draw upon his own inner resources to broaden his understanding of what courage might be? (p. 65)

To thin out the concept, rather than borrowing from another culture or ideal, but instead by drawing on traditions in novel ways is a courageous way to face unknown challenges. While Lear's study looks at the experience of the Crow people, the comparable conceptual loss in this work emerges from our experience with the three traumas of natality. The complications or phantasies of natality belonging to the shared human condition of loss are activated at multiple stages: being born, growing up, and trying to remember. So, if courage is paradigmatic within the thick concepts of culture and being courageous

when faced with a loss of concepts is possible, then merely thinking about childhood differently is also an example of courage. So, perhaps early childhood educators who look to Reggio Emilia for inspiration and new ideas are making attempts to be courageous as they demonstrate a desire for something different. The courageous person, according to Lear, will in any given circumstances be able to find the *appropriate* way to behave courageously. So the fact that we face natality and survive its strangeness is a form of courage. The contradiction is that we don't recognize natality once we are no longer new. Our courage is unknown to us, just like our natality. If we recognize this, does it change anything?

Natality Returns

What may have initially seemed like a whimsical encounter with an idea is clearly so much more than that. Arendt's concept of natality was a stepping-stone in stimulating a new way for me to think about the child. It is possible to frame our phantasies of natality as a response to a conceptual loss. Thinking about the process of being born and moving through and out of natality is a violation of our subjectivity; creating challenges for inter-subjectivity. Paradoxically, the loss of natality is necessary in order for us to claim ourselves as subjects. Recognizing our experience with natality through a psychoanalytic lens destroys ideas of an authentic, true or best childhood regardless of how tightly we cling to them. This study argues that we fail to consider natality when we think about the child and speculates on how everyday theories of child development foreclose the mystery of existence needed for the ethics of child/adult relationships. If children are different from adults, then adults have the special role and responsibility of introducing them to the world. The forgotten experience of birth and childhood after they have passed appear to create a reservoir of longing. In light of this research, we can say that a major component of the human condition is this loss of natality, and the exploration of this problem notably returns in literature as it constructs and deconstructs notions of childhood

through narrative. Representations in literature help expose these problems as they provide us the most distance from the emotions of daily encounters and felt experiences with real children.

At the beginning of the project I conceive of the child as an enigmatic object, one that is subject to adult projections and used as a placeholder for wishes, regrets, and anxieties. My understanding of enigmatic objects was initially simple and not clearly articulated. The idea of the child as enigmatic has developed as I worked to do what Lear describes as thinning out a thick concept. Over time I see the enigmatic object as a malleable, mysterious and radical idea of the child that can be continuously revised. Lear (2006) talks of the importance of the role of enigma in making imaginative transformation possible and this thinking draws me in. Perhaps enigma is not only part of thinning out thick concepts and working on making distinctions but also essential in opening up possibilities to create communication between conscious and unconscious, and between interpreted pasts, present realities, and unknown futures. While the child-as-enigmatic is unknowable, this figure also may present the opportunity for representations of forgetting and loss. The enigmatic child is contradictory and contains hidden meaning. The adult's wish to know the child, while derived and then fueled by the loss of natality (the object, the mother), is continuously thwarted by the fragility of development, the mobility and temporality of the child, and the fact that the child serves as a screen for adult desires.

Each chapter in this study is a conversation with a piece of literature. The knowledge gathered through these conversations brings the realization forward that the enigmatic object is a bridge between what was lost and the re-discovery of meaning. The enigmatic child reflects both our neuroses and our courage, because in this particular context when childhood is no longer, it is the child that helps connect us to its absence.

Literature and the Possibilities of Imagination

If imaginative excellence is the courage to look at things differently, what does literature offer us and why are we hesitant to take it up? What becomes possible through imagination and literature isn't available through any other means because while reading we filter our experience through aestheticization.

Dreams or literature invite us into a world that is beyond anything we can access in our regular conscious understanding (Lear, 2006). Literature can move us out of the dualisms like real vs. imagined or authenticity vs. forgery that we have become so comfortable with when discussing the image of the child. Kristeva's ideas provoke us to ask if narrative gives us satisfaction we can't gain otherwise. And Lear asks us to wonder how the anxieties of our dreams can transform into a story. "Dreams, as a creative play on affected reality, are one enigmatic resource because they invite interpretation and imagination. Literary knowledge, a knowledge that cannot be in charge of itself and that can set meaning loose without knowing its destination, is another" (Britzman, 2009, p. 79). Looking to literature is a courageous act. It is courageous because we enter the unknown, where things are not predictable and because "reading immerses the self in the fictional world of the other" (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 39). Literature possesses the strength to meet the impossible. It is a place that tolerates and makes room for affect and it becomes possible to abandon the 'child' as we know it. Our inarticulate thoughts and impossible desire become accessible when we read. Mishra Tarc (2015) describes how:

Developing the capacity to follow the formal and aesthetic operations of a novel containing the meaning of another's world supports us to gain an inner sense of the intricacies of signification.

In a novel, we can be surprised to find our tightly contained desires and wishes released by the other's words. (p. 40)

This helps us understand how literature provides a transference between the inner life of the reader and that of the writer.

The novels I have included in this study were essential informants in my experience as a reader and as I developed my conceptual framework. The novels in this project are intrinsically connected to my thinking about the problem of how we represent the child in light of our loss of natality. *Annie John* was a place where I first started to think about loss and phantasy as anchored to the love relationship between the adult and the child. The mother began to play a starring role as I explored the work of Melanie Klein in dialogue with Kincaid's novel. With *Never Let Me Go*, I was able to think about the search for the lost object, screen memories and was introduced to Freud's concept of deferred action or *nachträglichkeit*. I also started to ask questions about how to understand love and loss if there is no mother; neither conceptually nor literally. *Frankenstein*, one of my first objects of analysis, remains interesting to me because the creature (not a child at all) is a representation of the adult's encounter with natality and he exists inside, outside and beyond the novel. I reunited with Shelley's book when, influenced by Steedman, I started to think about the figure of the child and wondered - what happens when the figure exists beyond the story? And when are we able to let the child be a monster?

Literature as Teacher

Through the course of this project there was a change in my reading practices and my understanding about the possibilities of literature. Initially, I was reading for representations, meaning and evidence but slowly I became able to read for theory, alterity and new conceptualizations through dialogue between the literature and my thinking. I have come to see reading as natality of the mind, similar to the philosophical natality that Arendt conceptualizes and one I explored in the beginning of this work. Reading makes us aware of what we do not know and what we cannot know and our reading practices reflect a relationship to action and unpredictability. The novel can be thought of as an enigmatic object for when we read it is unpredictable, risky and moving. The novel can tell us things

about our birth and can reveal our mother, but we are still not in charge of literature, and reading itself is unstable and opens up the space of phantasy in an exciting way that we cannot do on our own. To return to Kristeva's (2000) ideas about revolt help to understand that it is possible that the creation of narrative through reading, writing and thinking allows for innovation. In this construct the enigmatic object is no longer a prisoner of cultural experiences.

So, what is learned about representations of the child by reading novels of childhood? Where and how did the four themes: 1) *Newness, fragility and the body*; 2) *Dimensions of time*; 3) *The emotional relationship between the adult and child*; 4) *knowing/not-knowing* reveal themselves through this study and what new knowledge, ideas and concepts have they helped to develop?

Childhood is a story easily concerned with dimensions of time, but the understanding that grows through this work is the recognition of a new relationship between time and the way we construct our image of the child through the narration of our own childhood stories. Each chapter explores a novel that is a story of looking back on childhood through the process of reconstruction and is a clear illustration of deferred action. Encounters with natality are found in the past but also again in the process of looking back. Dimensions of time are always at stake when constructing the child because meaning is found in the telling of the story, where the past is always remembered through the perspective of the present. The displacements of time that representations of the child offer have impact on the emotional relationship we have with the loss of childhood and our encounters with natality. Understandings of time change from clear concepts of growth and development into a fluid back and forth movement between times. Time is played with, stalled and preserved as we manipulate our constructions to serve our emotional needs whether as a form of nostalgic evasion or due to our infantile amnesia.

The enigmatic qualities of the novels provoke a new idea of the child to rise from the pages. In literature the child is free from the constraints of real time and expectation and so there is a new kind of liberty in shape, form and meaning. The child is open to interpretation. The flexibility of time that we access in reading and imagine when we construct the child offers a space for re-invention, to place loss, and to re-find significance. As adults we attempt to construct memories through the use of objects as illustrated by Kathy H. in *Never Let Me Go*. Placing things in time assigns significance and they are turned into vital narratives. A sense of what was lost appears in the cracks of our screen memories as we try to articulate the meaning of objects and relationships through telling stories. These narratives are an attempt to create a bridge between what we think we know and what we do not know about our past.

There is a considerable intersection between the themes of dimensions of time and knowing/not-knowing. In this work, knowing is initially a question of memory. We are challenged to make distinctions between remembering and constructing and are often unaware of the phantasies of natality that influence both memory and construction. Phantasy gets collected and stored but remains active and influencing throughout life in attempts to make present what is absent. Infantile phantasy is therefore not actual infancy but afterthoughts or imprints of infancy that rule our current desires and emotions. While none of us remember what we lost, this loss constitutes us. Nostalgic evasion seems to exist regardless of the type of childhood, the absence or presence of the mother, and whether it is the story of a real or a fictional child.

Knowing can make for new a body, as well as a new way of thinking. Knowledge creates or dismantles bodies as the revelations that arise from knowing can create illness and force our growth (*Annie John*), reveal the purpose of the body (*Never Let Me Go*), and show our ugliness and our truth (*Frankenstein*). As the child gains knowledge in each novel, they also need to develop and act out their phantasy life. The three novels in this project, teach us something but they also force us to sit in a state

of instability, where there is always something unknowable as we read. This feeling of unpredictability echoes the fragility of knowledge in relation to our childhood and being unable to know the past.

Ideas of newness, fragility, and the body surface and resurface throughout this study. Our construction of the child's body can be understood as a symptom of our loss and a screen memory for the lost object. The potential space of literature lets us think of the child beyond fragile, small, or innocent. The body is a site of betrayal as in *Annie John*, but also the object we use to bring forth our reparation and our wishes. Our understanding of the child's body has room for reinvention inside a novel through the enigmatic qualities of the novel and the reading process. The image of the child is originally held in the form of a child's body but transformed by new understandings. The child is represented by many kinds of bodies, including those of adults. The fragility of the child's body is emphasized but also questioned as new kinds of bodies, like Mignon, Sendak and Frankenstein are able to communicate as figures of the child.

This study describes ideas about how love is initiated in the body, where hunger turns to love and so explains how love is deeply connected to a physical sensation. Although, love moves from the body into the emotional world, it is never free from its origins. The challenge to symbolize what was constituted prior to language is projected onto the body of the child or the one who doesn't know. Just as the child's body becomes idealized, feared and manipulated – the same processes inform the relationship we construct between the adult and the child. The emotional relationship between adult and child changes from one that is created by the mother into one that needs her and rejects her and then seeks her out to atone for the past. This relationship is dependent, ambivalent and conflicted.

The relationship between the adult and the child can be partially understood as founded in what Arendt describes as the obligation of the adult to transmit knowledge to the child. The knowledge the adult must convey is focused on teaching the child to experience loss in order to grow up. This is ironic

as it is something every adult has experienced but cannot remember. The relationship between the adult and the child can also be understood as the in between. Neither internal nor external but the potential space of play that Winnicott discusses throughout *Playing and Reality* (1971). Winnicott's idea of potential space is about play. His term is designed to give time and space to playing. Play is also clearly important to early childhood education. Mishra Tarc (2015) also discusses what I see as a space of play in her theory of literacy:

In this communication of pressing inner lives without bodies, the novel provides a fleeting meeting space. The space is one of communication where one is not bodily bound to the other and yet is temporally bound to her words. The novel's effect on a person falls between fantasy and reality, between psychical and literary production, and reception, between reader and writer. (Misha Tarc, 2015, p. 39)

The relationship between the writer and the reader (or the adult and the child) happens inside the imaginative territory of the novel. Reading invites us into a space of phantasy and communication and into a conversation between reader and writer, mother and child, phantasy and reality with a drive to communicate and be understood.

The Unrelenting Presence of the Mother

The mother is present throughout this project. The loss in infancy, of the breast, the mother, the body, is substantial even if it is momentary. The force of the mother pushes through regardless of her existence. The absence of the mother is the space of love, and the desire for mother is the symbol of this loss. Beauty becomes idealized, like love, and is associated with a feeling of satisfaction. We create an aesthetic relationship to beauty in combination with our relationship to love and loss and this notion is inextricably linked to the idea of the mother. Phantasy acts as resistance against this conundrum and rather than grappling with reality we replace it. Her absence reinforces her presence

and we construct children in relation to mothers, even in our imagination. Whether the children of literature know and love their mother or have never encountered her they all seem to experience the same kind of loss, desire for reparation and set on a quest to deal with their past. When the child separates from the mother it is not only a gain for the child's subjectivity but also frees the mother. And while it seems to be a psychological necessity that the mother is destroyed in order for the child to claim subjectivity - she does not die. The mother becomes enigmatic, a ghost. Through this loss the child experiences the beginning of mental activity, the beginning of thinking. The void left by the missing mother and our pre-linguistic phantasies is filled by the always-unsatisfactory comfort of language.

The concepts that have become clear are: 1) the adult/child relation endures with or without the presence of actual children and for adults it continues long after the symbolic death of childhood; 2) the mother persists whether she was good, good enough or just a phantasy and we cannot imagine her away; and 3) our constructions of the child are dependant on our image of the mother. We have learned that the child never leaves us but sits as either a recollection or reflection of our past and in the construction of our image of the child. We tell and re-tell our stories of childhood. What does this interminable child mean for the ECE? And how does the ECE's phantasies of natality impact their work with children? There is also significance in the unrelenting presence of the mother. Our image of the child is intertwined with the way we understand the mother. The symbolic mother and her words, knowledge, and emotional weight are searching for acknowledgement in early childhood spaces.

Imagination, Subjectivity and Transference

This project has explored how concepts of the child and childhood are constructed with literature as the site of investigation. I have made inquiries into elements of loss, forgetting and phantasy while holding in tension theoretical explorations of literature (Britzman, Kristeva, Mishra

Tarc), childhood (Rose, Steedman), and psychoanalysis (Freud, Klein), as well as some familiar and perhaps unfamiliar children of literature (Frankenstein, Annie John, Kathy H.). Literature and literary creation is one of the courageous ways to work through loss, find new meaning after symbolic breakdown and bring it back into significance. In this place of imagination the child can become an enigmatic object, we don't exist in binaries and the concepts of truth and authenticity lose meaning and many things become possible

The inability to recognize the loss of our own natality forces our crisis to reside in the narratives we create about children. There is a gap in time between what we can term our courageous act of surviving natality and the sorrow of that loss, but the history of this melancholy does not disappear. "Sorrow leads us into the enigmatic domain of *affects* such as anxiety, fear, or joy" (Kristeva, 1987, p. 7). This loss, mourning and absence set the imaginary act in motion; they fuel it. Literature and literary creation is a difficult position for subjectivity, suggests Kristeva. The imaginary fictional essence is a representation of the subject's battle with symbolic breakdown (Kristeva, 1987). Literature can allow the devastation of symbolic breakdown the freedom to roam and re-create itself. This is similar to what Lear discusses when he talks of a collapse of concepts. Through literature this crisis can tell the story differently, re-create historical facts and attempt to recover from the conflict of our birth in a way we can't do consciously. Kristeva (1987) also argues that the affect communicated by the literary is kept at a distance and subdued and so "works of art thus enable us to establish less destructive, more pleasurable relations with ourselves and with others" (p. 17). The encounter with affect in literature provides an opportunity for inter-subjectivity and extinguishes the residual pain and regret of our childhood. Time and newness can disappear in the imaginary. Our loss can take on new forms and feel differently. It is courageous not only to survive the loss of natality but also to face it in our encounters with ideas of childhood and when we meet real children. With these alternatives in

mind are we able to challenge our ideas of subjectivity and develop a new relationship with ourselves and others?

In order to tolerate change and the uncertainty of meeting a ‘child’ we don’t know we need new concepts. This does not simply mean a destruction of the Other or recognition of our past but something else entirely. This is a complete change of narrative and demands flexibility in our thinking. To move childhood beyond the ‘child’ will mean positioning the child as an enigmatic object. While teaching us about ourselves, the child of literature is also an enigmatic object. Enigmatic objects need no justification and do not need to reflect experience but they have the potential to open up boundaries that regularly close down a field of thought. The concept of childhood as enigma may also provide a place that invites the interchange of our stories and perceptions. Enigmatic objects are open to interpretation but do not require it.

Even if we see how our own histories affect our views of childhood “there is no implication that one can glimpse what lies beyond the horizons of one’s historically-situated understanding (Lear, 2006, p. 95). If imagination is not related to experience, then perhaps we can relinquish our own subjectivity in both the stories we construct about our childhoods and the fictional stories of childhood informed by our phantasies of natality. Lear (2006) suggests, “in order to go forward – the only way is to give up the subjectivity entangled in that way of life” (p. 98). That would mean divorcing our experiences from our views. A temporary loss of our subjectivity may allow us the imaginative excellence to create or find something we cannot yet imagine. Using the gift of imagination and transforming our constructions into figures, we may find our way into new possibilities, visions of childhood, and human relationships; things that we may not be able to conceive of yet. Can we use our imaginative excellence to create brand new stories about children and childhood? Opening up the field of

possibilities is a potential risk, but, according to Lear, we already live with risk every day just by being human.

In the process of this work as a reader, writer, and researcher I have consistently come up against an unrelenting problem. To conceptualize childhood I am forever entangled with my own wishes for and beliefs about actual children, deeply rooted in my practice as an early childhood educator. I have fought to maintain my footing but inevitably slipped from thinking about constructions and into the world of the real child; caught by my emotions and desires to take action or do something. The child is always a real child due to the problem of what Freud (1915) calls transference – an emotional representation of understanding from childhood acting as a resistance to concepts that confront that understanding in the present. By the fact of being human I am implicated in the work and in the very problem I am trying to explore. To recognize or imagine the child as our defense against loss opens up a wildly emotional world of language, expression and aesthetic experience but also raises questions of how thinking in this way may promote or damage an ethical relationship between adults and children. The irony or paradox is that transference stems from childhood but in this context it is also about childhood. This contradiction complicates the geography of the problem but also helps us understand it more clearly. Difficulties in making distinctions emerge and we become confused between real children and constructions. Having the courage to think or take action is also challenging in the depths of our own transference. It is difficult to see what or how we are thinking when limited by our emotion and I believe it is this same problem that plagues the field of early childhood education. Revealed through the struggle of making distinctions is the significance of our challenge but also that our trouble in making distinctions is not something to correct but something to recognize.

Where do we go from here? The Anxiety of Pedagogical Implications

When I reflect on my thinking I see a number of enigmatic concepts that weave through my project and enabled me to find a place for my resistance to the challenges of my work as a teacher of early childhood educators. The field of early childhood education, always highly political and regulated, has seen significant shifts over the time I have worked on this dissertation. In Ontario, we have witnessed the introduction of full day kindergarten and a merge with the Ministry of Education, as well as the renewed energy of advocacy work that continues to fight for high quality care, better wages and a universal childcare program. These changes also carry with them an increase in the pressures of school readiness and the documentation of children's learning, a heightened focus on safety and supervision, and the overarching investment in what I see as an uncritical an image of the child. The theorizing and exploration in my dissertation can be interpreted as a form of personal protest against these ongoing demands that reinforce what I see as a rigid structure and lack of flexible thinking in the field.

While in the process of this work and engaged in what felt like the extremely radical act of questioning the deeply held beliefs of early childhood education, two significant events happened in my life. I obtained a full time position as a college professor of early childhood education and I became a mother. Both of these things required that I boldly face the questions I was grappling with - questions about real and imagined children and our phantasies of natality. Now, I see how my understanding of new and difficult ideas is deeply tied to what I read and when I read it and how the force of my reading experiences are so intertwined with these new understandings. I also recognize how the timing and intensity of my life experiences have shaped my project in terms of realizing the significance of the mother, the potential space of reading and writing, and my own deep desire to imagine something different. I feel that this piece of work has the potential to greatly influence the way I teach and think

in early childhood spaces. My dissertation narrates my story, as someone who never knew the possibilities of literature, but fell into a cavern of risky thinking while reading. After spending time reading, writing and being exposed to my own thinking, I emerged on the other side. I realize now that this is a project about imagination and my wish for ECEs to have space for their own creative ideas and phantasies, but it is also about the same sincere wish I have for myself.

This project began with a desire to explore and critique the mainstream image of the child in early childhood education. It moved to an exploration of representations of the child in literature and the way in which we tell and read childhood stories. This study transformed again into an exploration about what informs our constructions of childhood and what literature might teach us about this thinking. With time I realized, while interested in childhood, I was more intrigued by the psychical life of the adult and the adult's relationship to the idea of the child. Eventually this project evolved into an exploration of the phantasies of the reader and how imagination might impact the images of the child that guide the work and philosophies of early childhood educators. While the early childhood educator is not overtly present in each page of this project they are embedded in the questions of where and how we find the child and what we might be able to imagine differently.

Over the course of this study the child has become a figure, a container, a device, a concept and an adult experience. The adult is required in order to construct the child. The mother has made her presence noticed and necessary as she is beautiful, terrifying, absent, the cause of pain, the necessary disillusioner; incomplete, destroyed, and recreated. The initial problem I was concerned with was rooted in the field of early childhood education and the image of the child. This project transformed into an intensive study of the phantasies of natality and their impact on adult/child relations with emphasis on the process of reading literature and imagination.

I believe the field of early childhood education can benefit from thinking about imaginative possibilities and allowing itself to indulge in phantasy. Phantasies possess and generate anxiety but are also created and formed by it. Our representations are constructed to be a container capable of holding this anxiety. The recognition of the child as a construction is necessary in order for ECEs to manage their own questions of origin, phantasies of natality and create a space that can house narratives of the past, present and future. The injury of the experience with natality and the phantasies of natality that we hold, are triggered when we work with children who are in a perpetual state of loss (or growing up). The work of the ECE, who nurtures and cares for the child's body, also awakens the "aesthetic conflict" and the need for atonement due to destructive phantasies toward the mother. In order to make children, we make mothers but we do not provide emotional space for the mother in our constructions of the child in early childhood education. The resistance to the mother is a revolt against our phantasies of natality and appears as a screen for our traumatic emotional experience. This screen takes the form of a good educator and a competent and increasingly independent child.

I think there is a place for the work of this study to intervene in early childhood education but not as an action for practice. This work has the ability to create space for alternate theories of development and new ideas about adult/child relationships as we begin to see our constructions of the child as a screen for something that may lead us to critique our own conceptualizations. However, the willingness to take this risk is questionable. If we do take the chance, we unveil a potential space to play with ideas of childhood and pursue new directions. If early childhood educators find the courage to create a relationship with novel reading then they may encounter the new (new child, new idea, new feeling) in innovative and imaginative ways. Perhaps these challenges for thinking will create new relationships to the ways we construct childhood and how we understand these constructions as being rooted in a past we cannot remember and entangled with emotions we cannot understand. These ideas

could contribute to new debates on the topic of ‘the child’ and encourage a generous curiosity towards both children as real and children as phantasy objects for adults.

The Interminable Child

To conceptualize childhood we are forever entangled with our own wishes for and beliefs about actual children. These elusive, flickering narrative elements of subjectivity and their conflicts put pressure on normative notions of childhood by challenging ideas of forward growth, determinism, universal truths and authenticity. There is a need for phantasy to narrate the past. The figure of the child lets us try new methods. There is courage in phantasy but also a cover up. The satisfaction experienced in infancy can never be found in phantasy or reality because it does not exist in any form and because there is no adequate substitute. At the same time that our constructions act as a method of trying to re-work the past through children in order to retain or re-find what was lost, these same wishes for and about children are an attempt to disguise our anxiety and cope with it. Our challenges with the construct of the child are symptoms of our inability to tolerate beginnings and the uncertainty that accompanies it. Our loss of natality is almost inconceivable and places us in a constant state of recovery and one that is also about making reparation with the idea of the mother. Childhood is a loss that impacts us for eternity. And while the child is lost and irretrievable, the child persists and never leaves us. This interminable child has pedagogical implications but may also be a gift of and for the imagination of early childhood educators.

The figure of the child, developed through this study, becomes a tool for analysis of our relationship to remembering, anxiety and relationality, as well as a way to relook at our pedagogical philosophies. The figurative child is an enigmatic object that reflects our infantile amnesia, or repression of the past, but at the same time mobilizes our dreams and lets us play in the potential space of imagination. So, while adult forgetting (infantile amnesia) is the key to my critique of the field, it is

also the thing that provides us hope for new thinking. This means clearing the rubble of the past and finding the courage to have a relationship with it rather than trying to bring it back. To use psychoanalytic theory as a way to try to understand and make new relations to the child does not need to be threatening. The playful, descriptive language of psychoanalysis is missing from much of ECE. The recognition of the emotional life of the adult is often ignored in early childhood spaces as well. The themes I have uncovered in this work hold considerable meaning but few restrictions, which is a challenge in a world that is so highly regulated and with such high stakes like early childhood education.

A significant question of this inquiry was to explore the ways in which we might learn to employ the traditional resources we associate with childhood (play, imagination, natality of the mind) in order to undergo a radical transformation and adaptation in the face of our loss. As the work of this dissertation evolved, the significance of imagination has become clear. This is a study of imagination. And if imagination is psychological flexibility as Lear (2006) suggests then imagination is also possibility. Possibility is a placeholder – we don't know what it signifies yet. Possibility is unpredictable. Reading literature is a vehicle that helps us access this imaginative territory. If early childhood educators can access imaginative spaces we may see the boundaries of thinking for early childhood educators become flexible and we may meet a more enigmatic, phantastic and generative image of the child.

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