

## The Rhetoric and Representation of the Child and Childhood in Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess*

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*The Princess* is not a straightforward narrative.<sup>1</sup> While the poem seems to chiefly treat the gender issues of the day, using the college students, Lilia, and Aunt Elizabeth on the lawns at Sir Walter Vivian's to create its larger narrative frame, its allegorical and polemical aspects still allow for its traditional plot of love romance, ending with the insinuated marriage between Ida and the Prince.<sup>2</sup> In a twist, however, the love story is deliberately displaced in ways that differentiate it from what would be expected in a conventional treatment of gender issues. Especially after Ida's rejection of the lyrics sung by the Prince, "O Swallow, Swallow," the image of the child and childhood begins to intermittently appear in the discourse and works to overcome the opposition between Ida's college and the Prince's kingdom. The interludes sung by Lilia and Elizabeth, which were added by Tennyson in 1850, augment this mood of childhood innocence, with some presenting mother figures with children in their husbands' absence. While the shift of mood subtly swerves our attention from the love romance or the polemical issue, it alludes to various conceptions related to the child and childhood: reproduction, generation, consolation, bond, innocence, simplicity, idealistic aspiration, etc.

According to Hallam Tennyson's *A Memoir*, Tennyson considered children to be the key to understanding *The Princess*. He explained the reason for inserting interlude songs sung by Lilia and Elizabeth for the third edition in 1850:

The child is the link thro' the parts as shown in the songs which are the best interpreters of the poem. Before the first edition came out, I deliberated with myself whether I should put songs between the separate divisions of the poem; again I thought that the poem would explain itself, but the public did not see the drift. (*A Memoir* 1: 254)

Aglaïa plays a decisive role in the plot, indirectly bringing about Ida's defeat and

half-consent to the marriage with the Prince. Tennyson, however, emphasizes something more symbolic about the child as a whole, including the childhood of the Prince and Ida. Terry Eagleton discusses this in terms of the Oedipus complex of the Prince, which he sees as informing the poem's ideology and representation of sexuality, and concludes that being a child is a last resort by which the Prince can restore the order of a society disrupted by androgynous sexuality/politics: "The poem's ideological project will then be to 'resolve' this socially subversive androgyny by re-establishing that 'otherness' of sexual roles essential for socio-sexual reproduction" (Eagleton 77). Though his criticism grasps the essence of the poem, it leaves unclear how Tennyson used the essentially Romantic image of the child and childhood prevailing at the time in efforts to give a unity to the poem. Though some recent studies focus on the function of the interludes, they are not concerned with the idea of childlike innocence used in the Prince's courtship.<sup>3</sup> This paper puts emphasis on the concept of the child and childhood as what motivates the idealism or realism of the Prince and the Princess, and aims to demonstrate that Tennyson invents his own version of childlikeness and the child as a figure through which gender problems are rhetorically to be solved.

The overriding motivation behind the Prince's craving for Ida's hand derives from his impression of her in his childhood: "still I wore her picture by my heart, / And one dark tress" (I: 37-38).<sup>4</sup> In his innocent boyhood yearnings, he first loved her image not her person: "Ere seen I loved, and loved thee seen" (VII: 320). But his reference to his own memory betrays the possibility that his impression is not exempt from the influence of his mother, a figure who taught him the equality of gender and "faith in womankind" (VII: 309) and whom he regards "No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt / In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise, / Interpreter between the Gods and men" (VII: 301-303).<sup>5</sup> His almost infantile love may have been influenced by his unconscious assimilation of her image with his mother's, and his idealization of Ida may have been fortified by his mother and influence of his mother's domestic education. His reverence of his mother prepares him to understand Ida's gender campaign, but, simultaneously, works to determine his love for Ida in reviving Oedipal feelings now projected onto her, as Ida herself points out: "This mother is your model" (VII: 315) and "I seem / A mockery to my own self" (VII: 316-17). The Prince's love, far from spontaneous and independent, seems to be controlled by the discipline and instruction absorbed in his childhood and to embody a kind of love similar to the half-blind feelings he had for his mother. In this context, Ida's answer to him appears significant: "You cannot love me" (VII: 318). On the one hand, it

leads her to ask herself if she has the benign, heavenly character the Prince's mother allegedly had; on the other hand, it makes her doubt if the nature of his love stems from his individual will or is a result of his mother's influence. At points it sounds as if he is referring to childhood innocence in his courtship to justify his blind love for his mother (and his latent wish for having another mother in Ida). The more the Prince tries to emphasize the innocence of his love for her, the more he undermines his explicit statements as they suggest possibilities which can be understood in a very different light.

As has been noted by many critics, the Prince's suit superficially seems a strategy to undermine Ida's rebellion in order to restore the patriarchal order; however, psychologically, it is an attempt to regain the golden days spent with his mother (this time, with Ida). His intentional fall from the horse and his subsequent narrating his memoir of his mother are ingeniously planned and executed. On the one hand, he appears to be egalitarian, showing his understanding of new gender roles in a spousal relationship: "For woman is not undevelop't man, / But diverse: could we make her as the man, / Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this, / Not like to like, but like in difference" (VII: 259-62). On the other hand, he seems to conceal his conservative impulse to confine women to the domestic sphere or "childward care" (VII: 267), thus, utilizing the "difference" that he takes for granted and making them acquiesce to patriarchy. In his discourse, the Prince certainly respects women and vindicates their dignity and importance, but perhaps more as mothers: "If she be small, slight-natured, miserable, / How shall men grow?" (VII: 249-50). Here he implicitly idealizes the education he received from his mother and yearns for his own lost innocence and happiness. His wish from infancy is projected onto the semi-replicated ideal mother in Ida and her (educational) influence on their possible offspring. In a sense, this can be seen as an impossible attempt to redeem the unredeemable past. According to the Prince, in order to achieve the highest form of womanhood, Ida should also not "lose the childlike in the larger mind" (VII: 268). Insinuating that she has to be both the mother and the child, his rhetoric reveals the contradiction in his wishing both for the dependable/controlling (the mother) and the depending/controlled (the child); he hopes that she will become a perfect representation of the ideal female: a mother, a child, a lover, a wife, the domestic, and the patriarchal image of woman. It is significant that the same rhetoric is applied in the narrators' dimension. Lilia, who is a contemporary version of Ida, is also categorized as child-woman: "Lilia, wild with sport, / Half child half woman as she was" (Prologue: 100-101).

The Prince's rhetoric ironically expatiates on Ida's general view of women as "undeveloped" men. After trespassing onto the grounds of her college, he encounters her with Florian and Cyril whom Ida criticizes for their naïveté, categorizing them as children, intellectually underdeveloped men/women: "Your language proves you still the child" (II: 44). She unconsciously reveals that her language is dominated by that of male patriarchy and that her cause is destined to come under counter-criticism both from her companions and from her enemies. Ida's creed becomes more contradictory when she compares the Prince with a girl; she seems to detest his innocent dream and criticizes him for not practising the martial arts:

'Poor boy,' she said, 'can he not read – no books?  
 Quoit, tennis, ball – no games? nor deals in that  
 Which men delight in, martial exercise?  
 To nurse a blind ideal like a girl,  
 Methinks he seems no better than a girl;  
 As girls were once, as we ourself have been:  
 We had our dreams; perhaps he mixt with them . . . .' (III: 198-204)

Her language blindly follows the idea of opposed gender roles and tacitly approves the hierarchical order between sexes. Her derision ironically predicts her downfall (though not in the tournament) and her compromise with the social system she abhors. Her dichotomous understanding of female gender also creates opportunities for the Prince to deploy his persuasive arguments. First, Ida's description of her sex as innately naïve allows him to associate womanhood with childlikeness. Secondly, in his effort to persuade, he can now make use of her detestation of innocent, idealistic aspiration, which is in fact the very foundation of her campaign. Focusing on her contradictory two-fold conception of innocence, the Prince can now undermine her cause, especially when, in opposition to Ida's intolerance of the child and childlikeness, the college has received or is ready to receive children as it does Aglaïa.

Moreover, Tennyson shows Ida in a thrall to children. Deserted by Psyche and under siege, she takes Aglaïa as a hostage, and then as her "Sole comfort of my dark hour" (VI: 177) against the patriarchal world. The child plays a destabilizing role both in the poem's plot and in her theory of rebellion. As will be discussed later, Ida begins to succumb to the Prince's arguments when she is aware of the strong bond between Aglaïa and Psyche. Latent from the earlier stages of the narrative, children

are the key to Ida's self-realization. Talking with the Prince who, in disguise, pronounces having children to be women's duty, Ida reveals how her idea of children is influenced by patriarchal assumptions; she unconsciously expects her creed to be disseminated in the generation of her offspring:

But children die; and let me tell you, girl,  
Howe'er you babble, great deeds cannot die;  
They with the sun and moon renew their light  
For ever, blessing those that look on them.  
Children – that men may pluck them from our hearts,  
Kill us with pity, break us with ourselves –  
O – children – there is nothing upon earth  
More miserable than she that has a son  
And sees him err . . . (III: 236-244)

Her very negation discloses her wish to see her own children succeed in executing and perfecting her doctrines. Not unlike the patriarchal view, hers implies women's advantage in bearing children and imbuing them with their ideas, as long as the children do not err. She thus courts the danger of her cause being undermined both externally (the Prince's persuasion) and internally (Ida's contradiction). When the Prince ascribes children's innocence to their mothers' disposition, he can present his own innocence as the remaining evidence of motherly feelings and affection. Here Ida seems to unconsciously adopt his tautological logic with respect to mental/physical reproduction. Through the symbolic image of children, the Prince and Ida seem to be reconciled in their theories and emotions about motherhood.<sup>6</sup>

When Ida hesitates to reconcile with Psyche, Gama reasons with her, reminding her how her mother appreciated her tenderness: "Our Ida has a heart" (VI: 218). He substitutes the rational problem of gender for that of her personal emotion, women's fickleness. Defining tenderness as motherly feeling, he wishes that Ida will regain her true self and play the same motherly role. The bad model of mothers, on the other hand, is represented by Lady Blanche, who calls herself Ida's "second mother" (IV: 278). She renounced her husband many years previously, and treats her daughter, Melissa, rather mercilessly. While the quality of motherhood is represented and judged by childcare, lack of motherly emotion is associated with dogmatic feminist theories. Blaming Lady Blanche for having instigated Ida to take revolutionary action, Gama unintentionally proclaims how powerful and unquestioned a mother's

influence is, perhaps greater than that of patriarchal discipline. The pattern of the Prince controlled by his mother is reiterated in Gama's appeal; however, maternal potentiality for controlling children gives Ida a new prospect in her surrender to patriarchal principles. Gama's rhetoric, which registers her rebellion not against father and patriarchy but against mother and motherhood, situates the opposition between political power and the oppressed in a more complicated context.

Ida's gradual defeat in her struggle against the Prince can be interpreted as a manoeuvre on her part by which she acknowledges the ruling power; but by stressing the upbringing of children, she asserts that this can be accomplished by women only, not by men or male reason. Sensing her own future effectiveness as a mother, she now seems ready to accept and reevaluate a conventional, socially accepted role for women, whose virtue is associated with childlike "innocence." Ida's language in yielding suggests the analogy between this innocence and womanhood.

‘Thaw this male nature to some touch of that  
Which kills me with myself, and drags me down  
From my fixt height to mob me up with all  
The soft and milky rabble of womankind,  
Poor weakling even as they are.’ (VI: 287-91)

Her renunciation of political ambition coincides with the process of her character being assimilated to "soft" and "milky" motherhood; these words are also attributable to babies together with the word "weakling," and they possibly imply the image of Ida's possible baby to come. Figuratively describing her own fall, Ida defines the height as "fixt" or inflexible and isolated, and the ground as crowded with the emotions of women. This image is repeated in a different way in the song ("Come down, O maid") that she reads to the Prince at his bedside. While associating women with the earth, it induces Ida to go back to the social field inseparable from children and home:<sup>7</sup>

What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang)  
In height and cold, the splendour of the hills?  
But cease to move so near the Heavens, . . .  
And come, for Love is of the valley, come, . . .  
. . . let the torrent dance thee down  
To find him in the valley . . .

. . . and leave  
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill  
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,  
That like a broken purpose waste in air:  
So waste not thou; but come; for all the vales  
Await thee; . . .  
. . . the children call . . .  
Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn . . . (VII: 178-205)

The image of “ledge” is linked with Ida and her political cause is represented as “a block / Left in the quarry” (VII: 215-16); stone symbolizes sterility and emphasizes the immobility of her character. Conversely, it is (running) water that invites her to the fertile ground, and it is linked to the image of children. While (running) water represents life force, Ida’s radicalism is represented as wasted life or evaporated water: “dangling water-smoke.” Water is unproductive if it simply remains vapour in the atmosphere above—the height—and does not condense to produce “rivulets” supplying life energy.

The image of water prevails also in “Now sleeps the crimson petal” and in “Ask me no more,” associating women with sea, stream and lake and stressing their fertility as the major drive in spousal relationships. In “Ask me no more,” the woman is described as the sea contrasted with the sky, (though she is possibly represented by the moon too, as in the Prince’s comparison of Ida to the moon in his childhood); “the moon may draw the sea” (VI-VII: 1). Her intuitive drive is compared to a stream, and her final role as a woman is again identified as the motherly sea: “I strove against the stream and all in vain: / Let the great river take me to the main” (VI-VII: 12-13). In “Now sleeps the crimson petal,” the image of fertility is combined with that of the sexual, alluding to child-bearing role of Ida, who reads aloud the song:

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,  
And slips into the bosom of the lake:  
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip  
Into my bosom and be lost in me. (VII: 171-74)

Changing the image of submergence or corporal unification to that of a mother feeding a baby (“fold and “bosom”), the song implies the possible birth of children following the marriage of the Prince and Ida. As a whole, these songs read by Ida at

the Prince's bedside intimate revitalization through the cooperation of women with men in marriage and women's fertility, and the insinuated spousal relationship seems to be connected with the larger question about the continuity of human existence or society through regeneration.

In the context of the Woman Question in the 1840s, it is significant that the inserted interludes are sung by Lilia and Elizabeth. They annotate the love story and modify its nature, especially in their reference to the marital bond and parental love: regeneration and inheritance passed on from mothers to children.<sup>8</sup> Among the six interludes, two mention children from mothers' point of view. In the second interlude, a wife yearns for her husband's return from the sea, addressing the sleeping baby: "Rest, rest, on mother's breast, / Father will come to thee soon" (II-III: 11-12). The song only awkwardly fits in the narrative of the courtly love romance. The reader's expectation of the match between the Prince and Ida is deflected by the pictures of their possible, ominous future in the interlude; he is made aware of the fact that the love-winning story is just a part of something larger and continuing. In the absence of the father, spousal love is substituted by love towards the child; thus, her strong yearning for the absent husband becomes indistinguishable from her wish for the child's welfare and her intensified sense of motherhood.<sup>9</sup> The counterpart of this pattern is seen with mothers in the narrative; the mothers of the Prince and Ida are absent (deceased) but more influential than the fathers who play diminished roles in the love relationship. The Prince's apparent wish and Ida's latent acceptance seem to agree in reviving their mothers' character not only in each other but also in their possible offspring. Thus, the intuitive role play of motherhood and childhood exists as undercurrent of the rational power and history of patriarchy.

Therefore, the loss of patriarchal authority does not necessarily mean the end of its influence in the social system. In the fifth interlude, the husband is killed in a battle, recalling the fall of the Prince at the tournament. The wife first shows tears only when the nurse puts her child on her lap:

Rose a nurse of ninety years,  
Set his child upon her knee –  
Like summer tempest came her tears –  
'Sweet my child, I live for thee.' (V-VI: 13-16)

The child being a substitute for the deceased, the wife unconsciously commemorates this occasion by commencing her efforts to re-create the patriarchal order. Not only

is the child supposed to inherit its father's character and property, but also, as a "tabula rasa," it receives its mother's education and love. Recognizing the importance of lineage on the mother's side as more influential, Tennyson suggests children's innocence as balancing gender opposition. While mothers tell their children of their fathers in the interludes, the King and Gama do the same of the mothers of Ida and the Prince in the narrative. The more the interludes stress the fathers' absence, the more the reader becomes conscious of the mothers' absence in the narrative, and expects a possible child, who is to bring about quite a different quality to a politically unstable patriarchy in the poem. By "a strange diagonal" (Conclusion 27), Tennyson seems to signify the child and childhood as the third force in dealing with the gender question.<sup>10</sup> But his idea of childlike innocence seems to deliberately eschew that of the Romantic poets.

Wordsworth, who is largely responsible for the discovery and popularity of childlikeness in and after the Romantic era, presents the innocent world of children as purely belonging to the past. In the "Immortality Ode," he retrospectively describes the preternatural sense children have of eternity. The symbolic child depicted in the poem exists in and out of the present and the sublunary: "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest! / On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find" (lines 114-16). The poet wishes to discern and appreciate what the child in him has left within: "We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind" (lines 182-83). The same theme is repeated in poems like "To the Cuckoo" and "The Rainbow." Wordsworth sees children less as the achievement of human existence and endeavour, or the vessel of traditional values, than as the spiritual force from the beyond working for moral progress. According to Wordsworth, the prospect of a bright future is confirmed through contact with the innocence and divinity of the child.

In contrast to this philosophical view, the symbol of children in *The Princess* is incorporated into their social function. Their innocence is represented as potential to execute their parents' dreams and wishes, not in a philosophical but a practical sense. Childlikeness neither derives from pure source nor aspires to an ideal goal, but is shown as imbued predisposition. According to Timothy Peltason, the Romantic conviction of a link between the visionary and the actual is severed by a post-Romantic poet like Tennyson: "There is at least the fiction of immediacy, the fiction of an achieved continuity between the creative imagination of the poet, the language of the poem, and the world of our own experience. But Tennyson dispenses with this fiction" (Peltason 76). Though childlikeness is represented as the third

force in addressing the gender problem in *The Princess*, the intuited, Romantic idea is replaced by recalled innocence or inborn temperament in women, and the child is not associated with inspirational vision. As the Prince uses the image of childhood in persuading Ida, it has to be suggested, explained and re-evaluated, and it does not represent the immediate experience of childhood. Rather, it is fabricated (just as the collegians do in their narration) by adapting memories of infancy to the present situation. While the Prince strategically refers to the child as a figure by which Ida's gender problem is nullified or can be freshly reconsidered, she also seems to subconsciously recognize it and conspire with him towards some solution. Listening to the Prince's memoir of his mother, Ida now openly acknowledges the value of having a child:

Happy he

With such a mother! faith in womankind  
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high  
Comes easy to him . . . ." (VII: 308-311)

Her focus is on the successive moulding of thoughts and dispositions as they are passed down in a line of descent from mother to child, a form of motherly domination of children as a possible ideological strategy. This change in her thinking makes the Prince's courtship less repugnant and induces her to reconsider her former idea about offspring: "there is nothing upon earth / More miserable than she that has a son / And sees him err" (III: 242-44). When the inviolable image of childhood loses its moral justification and is transmuted into something politically serviceable, the child ironically becomes a target for Ida. Though partly evoking the image of Romantic, childlike innocence, Tennyson's poem seems to be more concerned with the social status of children once they have matured.

While Ida's subconscious enterprise is to re-establish her motherly power through the influence she would wield over her children, the Prince, by winning her hand, attempts to realize his maturity or manhood. In this sense, his compliment to Ida sounds ambivalent: "The woman's cause is man's" (VII: 243). For him, the completion of his manhood is identical with that of her partnership as his spouse: "Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself; / Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me" (VII: 344-45). His anticipated reign, maturity and self-realization are to be accomplished by their marital bond: the perfection of the political body and that of his own physical body (as symbolic of the political body) should be simultaneous.

When he has achieved a true masculinity by conquering Ida and her college/kingdom, the spell of his weakness, as evidenced by his "seizure," is to be broken.

He can break the spell of shadows (seizure) by gaining his ideal shadow, which the Prince loved and yearned for in his childhood;<sup>11</sup> his union with the actual woman overcomes the bizarre vision of inexperience and immaturity: "On a sudden my strange seizure came / Upon me, the weird vision of our house . . . Yet I felt / My heart beat thick with passion and with awe; / Then from my breast the involuntary sigh / Brake, as she smote me with the light of eyes" (III: 167-68, 173-76). The Prince strives to secure patriarchal principle which is symbolically represented as maturation, subtly instigating Ida to conspire in sharing in their mutual childlike innocence for their individual and common purposes.<sup>12</sup> He uses his own weakness or childlike quality rather than his strength to override gender debates, which clarifies Eagleton's view of the Prince's dependent, Oedipal attitude: "the Prince has achieved his manhood in love and battle, yet remains tied as a child to his maternal mistress" (Eagleton 81). Paradoxically, he has become a man by being a child. At the seizure in the tournament, he intentionally fell from his horse and became a patient for Ida; he stooped to conquer.

The Prince's wish to fulfill his manhood, which implies re-creation of his political body through his bodily bond with Ida, has been expressed in the metaphors he uses in his rhetoric; images to be reconciled and perfected. In childhood, he depicts the sensation he experiences when he imagines the unseen lover in metaphors of climate: "That bright and fierce and fickle is the South / And dark and true and tender is the North" (IV: 79-80)

I babbled for you, as babies for the moon,  
Vague brightness; when a boy, you stooped to me  
From all high places, lived in all fair lights,  
Came in long breezes rapt from inmost south  
And blown to inmost north . . . (IV: 408-412)

Together with the vertical separation between the moon (Ida) and the observer (the Prince), "North" and "South" represent opposite qualities: love is expected to be warm while the innermost loneliness is associated with coldness. Here the Prince's wish is not to assimilate them but to combine them; the opposites supplementing each other harmoniously. This association is further reflected in gender difference, and his idea of combination develops into that of perfection. He considers each sex

as incomplete and therefore to be united and perfected:

‘ . . . seeing either sex alone  
Is half itself, and in true marriage lies  
Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils  
Defect in each, and always thought in thought,  
Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,  
The single pure and perfect animal,  
The two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke,  
Life.’ (VII: 283-290)

The language he uses to explain the idea of perfection embraces not only mind (“will”) but also body (“the two-celled heart”), and signifies his belief in the need of heterosexual union for the completion of political bodies (“purpose”) to be achieved. When he mentions the union of cells, it almost sounds as if Aristophanes’ argument in *Symposium* on the cut halves is reiterated: “. . . yours, yours, not mine – but half / Without you; with you, whole; and of those halves / You worthiest . . .” (IV: 440-42). The Prince’s Platonic rhetoric recalls Ida’s subconscious desire for something incarnate to fill up her vacant feeling and motivate her cause. When Psyche shows her blind attachment to Aglaïa, taking the child back from Ida, Ida witnessed the strong physical bond between a mother and a child, and yet another case of bringing together imperfect halves: “Mine—mine—not yours, / It is not yours, but mine: give me the child” (VI: 124-25). When Ida returns the child to Psyche, she unconsciously professes her wish that her cause will be succeeded and developed not in Aglaïa but in the future possibility of having her own child: “Pledge of a love not to be mine, farewell” “yet how fain was I / To dream thy cause embraced in mine, to think / I might be something to thee” (VI: 180, 182-84). As a result of this experience, the Prince’s anecdote about his relationship with his mother may have now impressed her as credible. For Ida, it is a perfect example of a shared creed in body and mind, and it becomes the most appealing aspect of his courtship. In this way, the child and childhood function as the medium through which separate parts are to be integrated.

The Prince’s idea of associating perfection with innocence leads his rhetoric back along his personal history, and even that of mankind.<sup>13</sup> He justifies the spousal bond as the symbolic beginning of the ideal social state, borrowing the biblical image of the Garden of Eden. It is a world in which perfected human beings peacefully live in self-complete contentment, and one in which, in order to reach this

ideal interdependence, the Prince expects all to regain the innocence of infancy.

Then comes the statelier Eden back to men;  
Then reigns the world's great bridals, chaste and calm:  
Then springs the crowing race of humankind. (VII: 277-79)

Identifying the final completion with the initial condition, he defines Ida and himself as the explorers or founders (new Adam and Eve) for the possible, new world of equality and fertility. With his conviction of the coordination between the microcosmic (his contentment in the bond with Ida) and the macrocosmic (the peaceful, always progressing world of patriarchy), his encouragement of Ida evokes a seriousness and sense of duty echoing the ending of *Paradise Lost*: "My wife, my life. O we will walk this world, / Yoked in all exercise of noble end" (VII: 339-40).<sup>14</sup> The truth the Prince and Ida seek, as James W. Hood suggests, certainly lies in the reader's interpretation; "What knowledge the Prince and Princess gain of one another the reader decides" (Hood 92). Their target would be achieved, in the reader's imagination, by having their children as the cohesive force of their marital bond and their world vision.

The marriage between Ida and the Prince is only suggested in the poem, but its undoubted sign is shown by his testimony about the dissipation of his shadowy vision or seizure. Regarding Ida's surrender as reconciliation to her true self, he deliberately identifies his own enlightenment with her own.

. . . lift thine eyes; my doubts are dead,  
My haunting sense of hollow shows: the change,  
This truthful change in thee has killed it. (VII: 327-29)

Ida's identity is submerged in the Prince's rhetoric, and her "truthfulness" seems to be exclusively defined by the idealistic connection between his retrospective belief in childlike innocence and his prospective view of a new Eden in an indeterminate future. Here she seems to be no more than a plaything of his rhetorical game in the tradition of courtly love, just as he premeditates his fall from his steed in order to obtain Ida's compassion and her "gentleness" (V: 130): "Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain" (*Astrophel and Stella*, 1: 4).

. . . but she

No saint – inexorable – no tenderness –  
 Too hard, too cruel: yet she sees me fight,  
 Yea, let her see me fall!

Yea, let me make my dream  
 All that I would. (V: 503-506, 508-509)

His feigned fall causes the bigger fall of Ida from the throne of her college, undermining his own “truthfulness.” But he alleges that the fall occurred innocently; he “forced / Sweet love on pranks of saucy boyhood” (VII: 322-23). His registering of his act as childlike sounds ironic here and all of his rhetoric about innocence begins to appear sinister. Is his fuss about the courtship all for fun as Cyril suggests?<sup>15</sup> It is nevertheless true that the overall emphasis on the child and childhood in the poem comes together at the pivotal moment, and that the downplayed theme of a courtship romance is largely saved by the excuse that the poem is a “medley” and meant to be half-mocking.

In the end, the love courtship in *The Princess* seems only to stabilize a conservative, patriarchal social structure by ensuring that it will be passed down to and reproduced by its inheritors. However, in Tennyson’s discourse on childhood and childlikeness, the poet succeeds in representing the love/marital relationship as something more than political. He seems to “diagonally” answer the Woman Question, suggesting that only the image of children, as peace-makers, can emotionally justify accepted, traditional values. Lilia, who is compared to Ida, acquiesces when the narrative finishes because “the sequel of the tale / Had touched her” (Conclusion: 30-31).<sup>16</sup> Together with Elizabeth, she seems once again to recognize and accept the value of women’s role in matrimony; in marriage women can have confidence that they can educate their children and disseminate their own ideas:

. . . perhaps they felt their power,  
 For something in the ballads which they sang,  
 Or in their silent influence as they sat,  
 Had ever seemed to wrestle with burlesque,  
 And drove us, last, to quite a solemn close . . . . (Conclusion: 13-17)

The sympathy Lilia shows in disrobing “the glimmering statue of Sir Ralph” (Conclusion: 117) at the end of the poem seems to be the same as that felt by Ida,

who imagines and projects herself into the future as a mother of men.

1 Christopher Ricks points out the poem's lack of integrity and accordingly sees limited value in the poem: "It evades the artistic problems of the long poem, of narrative, drama, and lyric, by proffering a 'Medley.' Similarly, the moral issues of women's education are invoked and evaded by a 'strange diagonal'; the tone, the story, the outcome are at once earnest and flippant, and the crucial question – 'What's to be done?' – is left where it was found" (Ricks 182).

2 Some critics deny the possibility of marriage between Ida and the Prince; Jane Wright, for example, notes: "there is . . . no certainty that the woman he addresses is one who will accept his hand in marriage" (Wright 272). However, the image of the child and childhood is too strongly emphasized to be ignored, and it loses its essential significance without the implied marriage, as I will argue.

3 Like Anna Jane Barton's "Nursery Poetics: An Examination of Lyric Representations of the Child in Tennyson's 'The Princess'" and Purton's "Tennyson, Heidegger, and the Problematics of 'Home'."

4 All quotations from Tennyson's poetry are from *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969).

5 Tennyson's mother, Elizabeth, is the model of the Prince's mother: "To Tennyson she was a finer creature than his father, and he had her in mind when describing the prince's mother in *The Princess* . . ." (Pinion 113). Lilia's aunt is also named Elizabeth.

6 Alan Sinfield acutely points out that Ida's disposition prepares her own fall and that it is no other than her unconscious inclination for motherhood; he argues that the mother complex in the poem is not a problem as Eagleton suggests: "The attachment to mother, it is suggested, is not a problem but the answer" (Sinfield 142). His argument is developed in Rod Edmond's interpretation of the poem as celebrating the formation of family or family-value: "The real victor of tournament is family; feminism is routed" (Edmond 117).

7 Lindal Buchanan identifies the maid going down to the valley as Ida and interprets it as degradation and defeat, but Tennyson seems rather to imply creative, though limited, elements in her consent: "Princess Ida has indeed come down from the mountaintop, but she finds little hope for in the valley. Her vanquished college and the enforced marriage contract ultimately reduce her to self-hatred and silence" (Buchanan 588).

8 Critics dispute the function of the women's songs in the narrative. R. B. Ruderman says that "it was the power of the women and the ballads that forced this grotesque diagonal" (Ruderman 166). Rod Edmond similarly asserts that "the language of feeling ('poetry') conquers the language of ideals ('law' or 'system')" (Edmond 122). Daniel Albright, too, recognizes the power of the songs: "the lyrics are of such gravity that they threaten to tear apart the fabric of the fable" (Albright 237). Alisa Clapp-Itnyre underscores their feminist

aspect; “Tennyson, being read as a conservative applauding the downfall of Princess Ida and her women’s university, felt compelled to add these songs three years later to enforce his feminist sympathies” (Clapp-Itnyre 242). Marion Shaw is of the view that women’s voice is left unheard and coincides with Ida’s defeat: “lyric poetry, likewise belongs to a marginalized and feminine voice” (Shaw 48). Valerie Purton observes that “All [the interludes] were intended to emphasize one of the poem’s main themes: the importance of child as a figure of reconciliation” (Purton 238).

9 R. B. Ruderman argues that it is Tennyson’s anxiety about order in civilized society (patriarchal or not) that prompts his concern about representing child figures in difficult or unstable circumstances: “Throughout *The Princess*, the repetition of scenarios in which a child is worried over, or in which the Prince is reduced to a state of dependence resembling that of a child, works to ‘develop’ anxiety and to disperse it over the wide political, cultural, and ideological field that the poem represents, and to which it is addressed” (Ruderman 167).

10 John Hughes argues that Tennyson’s retrospective view of childhood can be understood in relation to his ingenious use of it in depicting gender conflict: “The reiterated myth of childhood joy in Tennyson is also specifically one where child and mother were bound together, before the knowledge and partitions of gender had come into being” (Hughes 107).

11 Cf. “In 1851 the ‘weird seizures’ of the Prince were inserted” (*A Memoir* 1: 251).

12 Gerhard Joseph explains the Prince’s maturation as only feasible with Ida’s change from “‘shadow’ into the sensuous and sensual ‘substance’” (Joseph 182): “Still, *The Princess*, seems to insist that the coming of selfhood to the man’s ego is a function of, is crucially determined by the maturation of the woman’s” (Joseph 182).

13 Daniel Albright describes the tendency of regression and androgyny in the poem as realization of the original unity of things: “This delicate feeling-backward toward primordial unity is a common occupation in the poem” (Albright 222). I would suggest that the retrospective view is immediately inverted into a view of the future, and this seems to be the strength of the poem.

14 The angel Michael describes the fate of Adam and Eve as trying but rewarding: “That ye may live, which will be many days, / Both in one faith unanimous though sad, / With cause for evils past, yet much more cheered / With meditation on the happy end” (*Paradise Lost*, XII: 602-605).

15 Cyril is represented as the only character who understands what Ida’s rebellion and the Prince’s dissuasion can mean and mocks the people involved in the event, including himself.

16 Daniel Denecke considers Lilia to be representative of readers who understand Ida’s secret, private thoughts: “Lilia may look like the perfect example of a reader who internalizes the verse-narrative’s ambiguity and thus drops out of public debate” (Denecke 222). Lindal Buchanan, in contrast, believes that the silence of Ida and Lilia does not change the fact that the whole narrative as recounted by the male collegians admits feminism as possible: “This is significant, for even though Ida and Lilia fall silent at the poem’s end, the fact remains that men have expressed feminist discourse and ideology to a greater extent than women”

(Buchanan 591).

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