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CHILDREN CROSSING BORDERS: EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE IN ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING'S JUVENILE CAUTIONARY TALES

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This paper focuses on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's juvenile cautionary prose-fiction tales in the period 1814 – 1818: *Sebastian or the Lost Child, The Way to Humble Pride, Disobedience, Julia or Virtue,* and *Charles de Grandville*. Border-crossing refers to the hardships of learning through experience in the process of individuation. A context of juvenile writing in England (late 18th – early 19th centuries) is suggested. Another purpose of the current study is to examine a child's frontier movement in view of the literary act as self-exegesis.

Key words: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, juvenilia, cautionary tales, border crossing, identity, ex-centricity

Based on a hermeneutical platform I would like to suggest at a later stage of this research, I focus on 5 works of E. Barrett's: *Sebastian or the Lost Child, The Way to Humble Pride, Disobedience* (all 1814)*, Julia or Virtue* (1816)*,* and *Charles de Grandville* (1818).1 Maturing in a tactile way in terms of length, complexity of narration, and subtlety of tagging moral, these stories offer walks beyond the borders of home. Roaming around forests known for their soporific effect (*Sebastian*), nearly drowning in rivers while saving one's sibling (*Disobedience*), instructing and forgiving infantile adults threatened by pernicious habits (*The Way to Humble Pride*), rescuing poor blind harpers (*Julia*), reflecting on one's own defects of character (*Charles de Grandville*), Barrett's child is eager to learn through experience – in mini Robinsonades, or mini gospels of self-help.

Juvenile writing possesses an exegetic potential: it actually aims at overcoming the monotony of singularity through development of the

[1] I have adhered to Elizabeth Barrett's original spelling and punctuation following Sandra Donaldson's complete edition of the poetess's work referenced hereby.

imagination as an emanation of the need to dialogize whereby feeling and fancy rule over rational consideration. Or, as Madame De Staël's Corinne argues: "fancy must ever precede reason, as it does in the growth of the human mind" (De Staël 1833, *Corinne*, ch.4, n. p.).2 In Browning's early moralistic tales the amorphousness of the notion of freedom in a child's mind gradually gets channeled into the awareness of practically useful knowledge not only as personal fulfilment but as a communal necessity.

A number of juvenile poems by Barrett in the period 1814 – 1819 relate of friendless, God-forsaken, jeopardized young souls, forgotten by adults, all alone in woods where beasts lurk,[3] of children driven by their fancy and desire for self-affirmation to forest huts, over the boundaries of the permitted, familiar, or proper (*The Beggar Boy's Petition to Little Sam*, 'Down in a vale, a little cottage stood', 'By the Side of the Hill Hollow', 'As I Wandered Along thro' a Wood', *Where Can Happiness Be Found*; *On Poverty* etc.). Although early poems hinge on mortality, death is not a preferred punitive tool or aim of cognition – a fact worth noticing against some formidable Evangelical notions of sin and damnation. Thus, a decree against disobedience may read: "Oh! Children all, then be aware/ Or you will fall in Sorrow's snare/ If ye your parents won't obey / Nor listen to their generous sway" ('Far along a Rugged Wood', 1814, ll. 21-24)!

Scholars have discerned Elizabeth's obsessions: places, objects, ideas – all converging into her ritualistic fidelity to the spatiotemporal value of a literary work. Elizabeth's passion for reading, however, was a pathway which excluded incidental contact with the external world and,

[2] A woman writer's agony over art as feeling and fancy is an issue well explored by M. Brotton in her research of the Georgian child and the impact of literature (especially *Corinne*) on E. Barrett's juvenilia. Barrett's translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (1819 and 1845-46; Browning 2010, 5: 326, 689–94) immerses the reader into her "darker, woodland gothic poetry" which conveys a young mind's descent into the unknown or uneasy to grasp. The result: a lifetime ontic hesitancy over divine truth as innate or experientially acquired (Brotton 2004: 158, 164–65, 186–87).

[3] Dorothy Hewlett notes the especial "cautionary" nature of Barrett's juvenile poetics, born, also, by the actual borderline position of the impressive family estate of Hope End which stood on the cusp between England and Wales – an expanse of free nature stimulating the imagination (Cf. Hewlett 1953: 12, 19). Margaret Forster' perspicacious research of the life of EBB stresses the "*cordon-sanitaire*" atmosphere of the natural peace yet stern patriarchal order the estate boasted. The child-writer produced stories and poems for her own mother who was supposed to buy those and disseminate them amidst the public; the family secured a unique form of protected, secluded, aestheticized existence, distinguished by a surprisingly varied bouquet of pedagogical rules and medical practices (cupping, laudanum, flannel rollers against indigestion and irregular menstruation) (Forster 2004: 3, 10-11, 14, 16, 25, 377).

for more than half her lifetime, with adults other than closest family members, nearest neighbors and reliable literary contacts (approved by father Barrett). An admirably avid learner and enthusiast willing to develop her talent beyond limits, eager to travel conscientiously through time, for the most part on her own and through knowledge of classical languages (Cf. Dennis 1996: 29, 31), Elizabeth fought infancy's "short-sighted" and imitative faith in the world (Alexander 2005: 78, 80). Letters to her family between 1812 and 1817 reveal her anxiety about limits: her own potential and position; her parents' approval for outings (BC 1984–1985,1: 9; letter 9, August 31 1812); her reception of art in the Louvre in the context of her uneasiness over distances threatening family unanimity ("however far – we may be separated [*sic*]; either in the gulph of life, or in death, my love shall triumph over it, and shall never be constrained", BC 1984 – 1985, 1: 20-21, letter 26, Decr 26 [1815]). She dreams of visiting Greece, "where we can receive so much learning," "… much beyond the bounds allotted to me" (BC 1984-1985, 1: 40-41, 45-46, letters 50 & 53, July and Nov 1817). Lilian Whiting notes Barrett's hybrid cognitive finesse – a girl with a doll in her hand, an 8-year-old connoisseur of Homer, and a protector of the poor (during her father's charitable missions "to revive the simple faith in God that … met every real need of life;" Whiting 2010: 23-26), as the writer's unpublished diary of 1831 – 1832 also informs (Barrett 1969: 5).

Always true to sense and content, at the expense of, often, neglect for conventional form (Hayter 1962: 15-16), Barrett relates to life as to a book-in-progress – in need of interpretation, just as do Sebastian and Julia in the respective stories. They decipher and rescue: Sebastian – his own grandfather from a dungeon in a wood, Julia – a starved Irish harper in the street of a pitiless urban world (for which she is rewarded with a handsome sum of money, and a title from the King of Britain – for her mother). Dramatizing a need to speak about growing up, Ba writes to "construct 'a second self,'" laying down her ambitions to communicate with family and strangers – through the centralization of child as protagonist (Cocks 2004: 94-95, 101). Humbly present through a 3rd-person narrator in *Sebastian*, *The Way to Humble Pride*, *Disobedience*, and varied, in *Julia*, by a more confidential We-narrative, and in *Charles de Grandville* by an ostensibly unperturbed 1st-person account, Barrett's own writing voice gets stabilized, nonetheless unable to overcome a hermeneutic undulation between self-certainty and external appreciation in capturing Self as process rather than product.

* * *

Let us peep into three other "juvenile" examples.

One. The Brontës' literary apprenticeship (1826 – 1838), for instance, extends beyond legitimate childhood. It includes tales, chronicles, adventurous accounts of eminent men, fanciful romantic novellas, journals, *The Young Men's Magazine*, Emily and Anne's *Gondal* sagas and their Birthday and Diary papers (1834–45). Marked by a much more prominent self-expository authorial voice, audible in a steadier "I" narrative, they persist through an impressionism of conveying their minds, with some incidents involving a wider and more elegant range of characters and almost documentary historical precision (e.g. The Peninsular War, 1808 – 1814), prefaced, occasionally, by the author's intentions. Charlotte's opulent imagination is a desire to cognize by way of overcoming internal conflict and boundaries by wading into animated nature and architectural designs ("barren land, the evil desert," "high mountains," "gloomy forests", "the slough of criminality," a "vast, enclosed plain full of tombs and monuments," "a … house, … hid from view by a thick forest" etc. (Brontës 2010: 5, 7, 8, 31, 35, 55, 57, 158).

Two. Jane Austen's *Love and Friendship* (1790) and The *History of England* (1791). In the former, during a roundabout journey between Bath, Bedfordshire, Wales and Scotland, orphaned (and soon widowed) Laura declares her aspirations beyond the provisions of her upbringing: "When in the Convent, my progress had always exceeded my instructions, my Acquirements had been wonderful for my age, and I had shortly surpassed my Masters" (Austen 1922: 3). In the latter, in a critical account of English royalty between Henry IV and Charles I, by "a Partial, Prejudiced, and Ignorant Historian, with very few Dates" (Austen 1922: 101, 103), Austen parades unconditional trust in history as a defective attitude, purporting to interpret major episodes of her very own England imaginatively, without "informing," relying, inter-textually, on "Shakespeare's plays" as a chief chronology, sparing readers what she believes they already know, disputing what she could not actually recollect (Austen 1922: 110). Succinctly, the writer hints that, despite the seriousness of her endeavor, neither the gravity of content (e.g. a debate about Roman Catholicism over Anglo Protestantism), nor the assumed acceptability of form (a chronicle) of what she writes ought to be taken at face value.

Three. Christina Rossetti's *Maud* (1850) was written when the poetess was approaching the outermost limit of childhood – the age of 21. *Maud* relates of a true talent which perishes in the vice between conventional acceptance of social roles ("daughter, sister, wife," Rossetti

2008: 293) and a young individual's ambition to attain self-fulfillment through poetic composition. Her genius is never granted a form of recognition – physically, or spiritually. Maud Foster, aged 15, "small though not positively short ... easily … overlooked but … not easily … forgotten," locks her writing book – "neither Common-Place Book, Album, Scrap-Book nor Diary," but "a compound of all these," with "original compositions not intended for the public eye" (ibid. 265-66). Maud gets fatally hurt in a carriage accident while travelling: three weeks later she dies, unable to finish an *Epithalamium*. What is Maud's transgression? Cognizance, hypersensitivity, infectious cheerfulness, yet utter self-criticism, and some triviality (she is deemed foolish and affectatious, ibid. 266). A prolific writer, she exceeds by far her cousins and friends' literary talents, and in a bizarre sonnet she argues that "youth is not always such a pleasing sight" (ibid. 271). But perhaps her greatest weakness and her tragic mishap is her promise of a "strict conformity to her mother's injunction that both windows should be kept closed" (ibid. 286): Maud might have been able to jump out of the carriage and avoid the disaster. It was all about a window closed – a minute detail yet a symbolic prompt about restriction, barrier, and counter-pedagogic myopia.

Reactionary despondency, stealthy irony, and non-conformist curiosity plague Barrett's juvenilia, too.

Elizabeth may well have commemorated the patriarch of Hope End when conveying Charles De Grandville. Now 21, a "child" sufficiently independent and able to secure its own safety, in a gust of ekphrastic self-expression yet self-doubting fear, Charles looks at his dead father's portrait which issues "a dreadful anger within his dark sparkling eyes" and "a bitter smile … on his curled lip" (Browning 2010, 5: 276). In other tales (*Sebastian, Disobedience* and *The Way to Humble Pride*), all penned by a pre-teenager, Barrett interrogates age a factor of self-sustenance. Julia is barely able to pronounce properly: she may be about 3. Sebastian is "about six years old." Oliver (*The Way to Humble Pride*) may be similarly aged. All three rescue adults.

An outstanding instance of solid faith yet disregard for parental authority is Sebastian, noted for his "negligent simplicity," trust in instinct, and fancy. Sebastian lives in a cottage on the borders of Whales. A natural learner, he wades into the wood, assured – upon his grandfather's advice – that there are no ghosts. A triple falling asleep provides a proleptic insight of the whereabouts of his suffering grandfather in Sebastian's progress toward knowledge: from "frightful dreams," through to a prayer ("Oh! Heavenly Father [!]"), and the discovery of "a magnificent Castle" where

his grandpa wanes, robbed of all his money, locked, hoping for mercy from above (Browning 2010, 5: 185-86). Here, infancy stands for providence: Sebastian arrives in time to rescue the lugubrious adult ("Now you my son are come to deliver me") – they both leave "by way of the trap door." The story remains elliptical, judging by Barrett's last punctuation mark – an ultimate dash stands for narrative tension and explanatory contrast.

In *The Way to Humble Pride*, *Disobedience* and *Julia* a child's misery is aimed at instructing and chastising the parent whose ignorance is thus exposed against a massively uninformed adult world. A dedication (*The Way to Humble Pride* and *Julia*) inserts an authority-addressee – Elizabeth's own mother, Mrs. Barrett: "Madam, I request you to accept this little story …. If you would buy this yourself & write copys to be sold for the public. … I am, … / Your most ob^{t} Hum^{ble} Serv^{t} / Hope End 1814 …;" "I dedicate this little volume to her whose smile ever cheers my endeavours to please, … who shines an ornament to her sex, and all around her" (Browning 2010, 5: 185–86, 217). The child's work is to be merchandized and the distributor is required to note the writing "I". This creates a needed distance between author and target recipient, securing the longevity of the literary work as a message in the process of dialogue between two participants – in the same game in which the young writer expects to be recognized and financially rewarded for her efforts.

All five stories contain the element of a home-away-home cyclic journey which allows for revision of one's previous behavior, with prospects for the future, and a shift of importance from centre (home) to periphery (beyond home). In *Charles de Grandville* an unexplained sin is suggested so that the self-reflexive narrative has a recuperative effect but because the story is left incomplete there is no evidence of reformation. Maturation never occurs without some illegality of moving around: a perilous wood (*Sebastian*), a beckoning river (*Disobedience*), the implied metropolitan gambling house (beyond the family's home, "some miles from London," *The Way to Humble Pride*). The actual dangers of other spaces (wood and city) get muted for the experiential wisdom they offer.

A child's mind grows – the stretch of literary events becomes longer, more complicated, inclusive of a greater range of characters, and a need to verify a moral lesson in conversation. Hence the dramatization of an initiatory problem in more or less independently defined parts, or chapters (*Charles de Grandville*), or in a clearly demarcated journey between countryside and city (*Julia*, whose original manuscript amounts to 15 separate sheets of paper). Storytelling unfolds as self-exegesis in time and space – in dedicatory headings, or through a retrospective architecture

where argumentation conveys a guilty confession about one's inability to be a better person. Experience begins to look like a shared educational playground between author and character. *Julia* starts with a spelling exercise ("no my know dare," ibid. 217). *Charles De Grandville* promotes a self-conscious narrator who intrepidly makes an example of his own failure of mind and character by way of emotionally hiccupping over his uncouthness and remoteness from closest family and friends. In *Julia* the narrator is docilely detached through a 3rd-person posture which prefigures a sermonizingly Thackerian *We* – a self-ironization above a multitude through storytelling as an apologetic self-concealment and minimization of an ideal: "*we* must now withdraw ourselves from the drawing room of fashion, to the smiling playroom" (ibid. 217, emphasis added).[4]

The only tale with a truly female protagonist is *Julia*. The demolition of boundaries between infancy and adulthood here transpires through a child's assumption of responsibility for action, through the counterbalance between literacy and empathy in Julia's attitude, and through the writer's decision to credit the juvenile heroine with a voice of her own, audible at critical moments of the life of the family. The tale's volume surpasses the earlier modest production. *Julia* is termed "a novel" – a declaration of the writer's expansive project and an expressed preference for a specific genre. The misery, redundancy and spiritual starvation implied in the pun the name of the family estate contains (*Crapton Hall,* "the asylum of misfortune," i.e. "crap," ibid. 217) are made up for by the harmony Julia brings to the place, where she and the valiant governess Miss Octavia Mordant rescue people in the fire that occurs (while the mother is preposterously passive yet rashly prepared to "die with [Julia]"). Child and servant manifest the writer's desire to create a richer social background and a romanticized context for the *vice–virtue* conflict: goodness and generosity of mind are not directly proportional to literacy and a higher rank. Julia's speeches deserve recognition. The child's infelicitous grammar clashes with the juvenile character's generosity of mind. When she donates her money, intended for a doll, to the blind harper, she utters "*no mind pepy daw my die dare poor Man*" (ibid. p. 219), which, translated into adult language, probably means: "never mind my pretty doll [as] [the] poor man may die." During the fire at Crapton Hall Julia makes an important decision: "Dare fire urte, my no mind, pute my down, taky poor Boy.' Said she pointing to Oliver; 'Den come upy my' – she paused – 'oh but den fire urty you den – Well leavy my me den – my die den – my do

[4] Compare: "We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants" (Thackeray 1998: 346).

doody God upy dare." In short: the fire may hurt her, but her brother Oliver must be rescued first, the Countess must take care of herself; a good turn is right and proper for a Christian. Julia could not be more than 4. The child writer herself disguises her own fears and reflections on virtue by way of distinguishing another, younger, child – through speech. That is, a) she is able to see herself from the outside, from a distance; b) she appreciates her own experience as a child. A wise and crafty authentication of the infant writer's own age – in contradiction to its supposed experiential limitations.

Elizabeth's juvenile literary world epitomizes the comforts and restrictions of middle-class life. This would explain the range of breach of normative behavior corroborated in the exchange between author and heroes as well as child and adult. Children bathe in almost palatial comfort but not beyond the standard of their class. A bunch of privileged heirs, Barrett's young explorers are in for trouble by definition: there is plenty to breach as things have been all too well arranged. Nearly all are emotional outcasts (and Sebastian – perhaps indeed an orphan). A desire to satiate one's curiosity and see what is beyond – in the wood or in a river, or around caliginous city streets – is a chance for liberation from the cast that class and gender mould. In *The Way to Humble Pride* the family lives on the curbs of London; it is the father who falls into disgrace – a veritable critique of adult sanctimony dismantled by a final moral: "it is not riches alone, that can make people happy, but also Virtue" (ibid. 187). In *Disobedience* the family castle has perched on the borders of the Liffy – possibly a token of the writer's own eagerness to expand her geo-cultural knowledge[5] beyond the borders of her native state.

But there is one crucial component of border-crossing on the level of aesthetic self-perception. The androcentric turn Barrett takes as she opts for boy-culprits over girl-delinquents. As many pedagogical literary examples signal, mischief is not gender specific. Neither could it be trusted that tutorship is gender restricted. What matters is that a young male protagonist allows the author – a young woman – to bargain, expand, and examine herself reversely, at a stage when her own family would be the organ of sanction of her talent and literary performance. In *Charles De Grandville* we have an adult male 1st-person narrator who prefigures a characterological (Dickensian) self-revisionist – repulsed by the material

[5] Barrett's early correspondence documents her family's trip to France in 1815. On the other hand, her aunt and uncle are known to have lived in "County Carlow, Ireland, near Dublin and the River Liffey" (Donaldson. In: Browning 2010, 5: 189).

privileges of his own milieu, left on the fringes of visibility, audibility, professional contributivity, and emotional involvement.

Further on, I should like to indicate the necessity to consider Victorian psychology in terms of understanding promotive and repressive attitudes to infant self-sufficiency in literature, based on the empirics of pleasure and pain. I would urge an investigation of the porousness between innateness and actual experience in the cultivation of knowledge (based on E. Burke: Burke 2001: 543, 548, 550) as a dependence between "enfolding" and "unfolding" through language of man's contrary desires to be for oneself yet for the sake of an other (Cf. Herder 2012: 204, 209). The latter would take me to debatable points such as: objectified reality; the boundaries of self in terms of an ultimate other who helps the *I* get ferried across time and space by way of overcoming its illusory givenness as sameness, aloneness, and absolute separateness (i.e. "sense-certainty through something else;" Cf. Hegel 1977: 58-59, 67, 80); the placement of one outside of oneself in pure perception as an arrival at the other in the acquisition of knowledge (Bergson 1991: 28, 45, 75); the transformative impact of truth-telling in education, and the problematic demarcation line between vice and virtue, play and real life, sensation and ideation (Cf. Hume 2009: 17, 21, 698–99, 724; Baier 1993: 267, 271); the unattainability of absolute objectivity within the constant erosion of boundaries between self and other ("one cannot be thought without the other, … instead one passes into the other," which jeopardizes egology (Ricoeur 1994: 3-4, 16, 32, 56, 86, 110-11, 122)); and Barrett's ontic sway in self-objectification as self-doubt. To this I would add an Eagletonian touch: limits create man and self-legitimation proves to be a denial of absolute freedom "except in pure solitude" (Eagleton 2005: 68, 72).

Barrett's synoptically didactic early cautionary tales aim at engaging with child: its emotional life and its unruly nature in a world where abiding by, and rejection of, norm go hand in hand with the reconciliatory yet subversive essence of self-exegesis as duty. The emergence of a child scholar-critic is accompanied by the gradual centralization, self-interiorization, and stylistic stabilization of the young protagonist through a 1st-person narrative voice (*Charles de Grandville*) whereby the mind becomes its own story. Further research on the birth of the writer in Elizabeth Barrett as related to the matter of the acquisition of knowledge as trespassing conventions may lead us to a modest conspectus of topical expertise: Athena Vrettos's cogitation on the role of evolutionary biology in understanding child psychology and correctional children's fiction regarding "the stability of the self and the coherence of consciousness"

(Vrettos 2002: 74, 82); L. C. Roberts's exploration of 18th- and 19th-century moral tales intent on acculturating the young mind in terms of promoting self-criticism with regard to gender (Roberts, L. C. 2002: 361, 365, 367); Margaret Evans's look into the transformation of the scary late 17th-century moral tale for children into a friendly companion, with "death and damnation… still important concerns" (Evans 2004: 239, 242); C. Sutpin's observations over the Victorians' "conflicting constructions of the child" as sinner and angel (Sutpin 2004: 54-55). In other words, there is a scholarly context which scrutinizes the redemptive, conversational, and gendered background of learning and of literacy in a class-conscious society which places the matter of the utility of reading within the epistemology of knowing the unknowable.

As for contextual examples from children's literature produced by adults, I would emblematize: the catechetical emotional journeys in Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658) and early 19th-century illustrated renditions of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678); tutorials in piety and play in Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs* (1715), (with a ball and pincushion practice in) John Newbury's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744), and A. L. Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778–79); the lifelike domestic tales, varied between often recondite prohibition and true entertainment, in S. Fielding's *The Governess, or, Little Female Academy* (1749), M. Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), M. Edgeworth's *The Parent's Assistant* (1800), M. M. Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818), and C. Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839); the relativity of truth and goodness in E. Lear's *Book of Nonsense* (1846), L. Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), G. MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), and R. L. Stevenson's *A Child's Garden Of Verses* (1885), to mention but a few.

In Barrett there is no bitter instructional prophylactic (of the kind, say, James Janeway's *A Token for Children*, 1671, conveys by way of publicizing the acutely distressing anguish of those doomed to suffer in harrowing hell)[6]. The child-author is contemplative and innately empathetic. Her juvenile moral tales exemplify what I should like to define within Hayden White's meta-historical juxtaposition between Romance and Satire: "a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it" and the

[6] "O Hell is a terrible place, that's worse a thousand times than whipping; Gods anger is worse than your Fathers anger… O Child, this is most certainly true, that all that be wicked, and die so, must be turned into hell; and if any be once there, there is no coming out again" (Janeway, qtd. in Zipes 2005: 512).

ultimate admission that one is "a captive of the world rather than its master" (White 1975: 8–9). *Sebastian* and *Charles de Grandville*, best of all, describe childhood and adolescence as the necessity to seek, yet the impossibility of a full attainment of, independence as self-fulfillment. Growing up is never easy. But it is literature – the activity Barrett gave herself to ever since a young child – that, as Iser argues, "permits limitless patterning of human plasticity, … [indicating] the inveterate urge of human beings to become present to themselves; this urge,…, will never issue into a definite shape, because self-grasping arises out of overstepping limitations" (Iser 1993: xi). The self-exegetic value of border crossing – whether occasional or deliberate – particularizes the status of the child as mediator between ignorance and literacy in ontological terms. Here, the temporariness of the physical and mental "consistency" of the growing individual[7] may be seen as compatible with the notion of the permeability of the boundaries between independence and dependence in the relationship between, and typology of, characters as well as on the level of a writer's self-fashioning.

The intercourse between disobedience and obedience, fault and success, reprimand and reward, ignorance and insight in early Barrett may be viewed as a communication between (authorial) singularity of mind and recurrence of (inherited) cultural-behavioral models in children's dramatic development based on leaps ahead through surprises provoked by instances of pain. From the viewpoint of historical hermeneutics, "singularity is only half the truth … Without the recurrence of the same, … singular events … could never occur" (Koselleck 2018: 5). Translated into the context of Barrett's juvenile cautionary tales: no conventional barriers set by proper parental presences (or absences) – no incentive for discovery, no chance for individuation through the acquisition of knowledge through experience, despite the rate of peril involved and the predictability of outcome typifying such adventures. Finally, I would venture an essentialist-experientialist coda, resorting to Locke's concept of the clear board on which life scratches (as it incites a most humanizing faculty – the imagination): "Let us then suppose the mind to be … *white paper, void of all characters* … ; how comes it to be furnished? … Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer … from experience" (Locke 1824: 77, emphasis added). Touch and sensation – first. Fancy, reason, and an 'I' – second. "Character" – printed or literary – may be taken as an advertent metaphor for the promethean struggle between containment and liberation,

[7] "… it will be impossible, in that constant flux of particles of our bodies, that any man should be the same person two days, or two moments together" (Locke 1824: 84 – 85).

imitation and free will, a struggle which would become a holograph of Elizabeth's own life – an inevitability of knowledge as (artistic) survival. Knowledge… it bugs all those who choose to dispute their age, size and capacity, even if just by way of scribbling.

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