

Malattachment and the Self Struggle

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Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: The author's doctoral dissertation, *Malattachment and the Self Struggle*, offers an in-depth portrait of intergenerational attachment disruption, its relationship to depression and defensive personality disorders, and approaches to healing—all within the context of the fictional narrative of Pearl, for whom "mothering tears her open, then urges her to wholeness." This excerpt features an explanation of the effects and implications of an attuned attachment relationship between infant and caregiver, casting it as critical developmental nourishment and terming its corruption malattachment; the importance of the caregiver's own self-narrative; a discussion of the unconscious implicit learning and memory processes that engrave lifelong relational patterns in the growing child; a portrayal of personality "disorders" as the self-struggle-adaptive survival strategies forged in the face of thwarted attachment; and the seldom-explored notion of energetic abandonment. These theoretical discussions are set against the relief of Pearl's suffering the dual cut of the wounded-mother knife: the agony of her own parched capacity to mother her son, and the painful awakening of her own long-dormant malattachment wounds. KEY WORDS: attachment; malattachment; relational trauma; postpartum depression; mothering; brain development; neurobiology; personality disorders; narcissism; borderline; depression; narrative INTRODUCTION The following is excerpted from a collection of contextual essays that accompany a novel (one essay per novel chapter) which together comprised my doctoral dissertation. The novel is a "fictional memoir," a deep narrative exploration into the experience of a woman brought to her existential knees by the relational demands of motherhood, called to confront her own painful family history of loss and separation and to chart a course of healing. As the protagonist Pearl McEvoy struggles to break the cycle of abandonment that is her legacy, the reader is invited along as intimate witness to her revolutionary journey of awakening. The companion essays synthesize and extend leading-edge research into the central developmental themes raised in Pearl's story, such as attachment, separation and relational trauma; narcissism, borderline, and other "defensive personality styles"; and depression, all within the developmental contexts of adoption, marriage, and motherhood. Pearl is a thirty-something, relatively affluent, well-educated woman who says "I know I have the perfect life—I just can't feel my life."¹ She is slipping through the cracks of her eroding persona as the pumice of her son's raw, baby neediness keeps working away at her lifelong fortress of psychic defenses. She is coming undone to have the chance to be remade, to reconstruct herself in the image of wholeness and health. On the one hand Pearl's situation is far more common than clinical statistics would suggest (NIH, 2002), and on the other, she could be diagnosed with, and pursue conventional treatment for, any of a handful of currently popular DSM-IV differentials. Postpartum depression, dysphoria, narcissistic personality disorder, and even attachment disorder present as themes in her behavior and personality. However, Pearl charts a healing journey that is distinguished by an orientation of integration and holism to "dis-eases" of the psyche, rather than the fragmentation and reductionism so prevalent in therapeutic settings today. In the contextual essays is developed the view of the above diagnoses not as the discrete psychosocial "malfunctions" into which our predominant reductionist mental health model atomizes them, but rather as a coordinated suite of adaptive survival strategies, developed staggeringly early in the life of this individual. The Revolution in Attachment Theory It is just in the past five to ten years that researchers have discovered the stunning details behind the pervasive, lifelong implications of the attachment relationship that Bowlby began studying in the 50s (Bowlby, 1973; Hrdy, 1999). For the intervening forty-some years, attachment—despite its evolutionary origins as a basic, physical survival drive—has been viewed primarily as a

psychosocial construct, measured based upon the intensity and features of attachment behavior exhibited by the child in relation to its primary caregiver. (This primary caregiver will herein usually be referred to as "mother," or sometimes "attachment figure," for ease of language; it is acknowledged that it can certainly be a father, or any other consistently present and responsive adult.) A child's secure attachment has since then been viewed as the optimal context for healthy psychosocial development. In the post-Bowlby decades, further research into the dynamic range of infant adaptive attachment styles relative to maternal behavior elucidated the "two-way street" aspects of attachment (Main in Green & Piel, 2002) (and yet we still don't routinely see mothers labeled as "attachment disordered" when their children exhibit anxious, avoidant or disorganized attachment!) The 90s gave us the "decade of the brain" and ushered in the field of psychobiology, including, specific to this inquiry, research on the neurobiology of attachment. This has brought us exciting, sobering evidence of the life-shaping power of the heretofore enigmatic attachment relationship, evidence that is ever more irrefutable since it is based upon chemicals and neurons that can be viewed in blazing color in PET and fMRI scans. (As one developmental neuroscientist commented on a PBS talk show, when we "biologize" a phenomena that has customarily been viewed as developmental or psycho-social such amorphous realms!-it somehow becomes more tractable. Of course this is not surprising given the pervasively materialist bias of not only socio-biological research orientations, but of the wider culture (Dossey, 1999; Rubik, 1996).) What has been revealed about the processes and implications of attachment is nothing short of astonishing and nothing less fantastic than the most elegant science fiction: a currently proposed "open-loop model" of attachment physiology suggests that the process of close, connected communications within the attachment relationship is used by social mammals to "tune" each other's physiologic homeostasis² (e.g. Amini, Lewis, Lannon, & Louie, 1996). During these regulating interactions, the child relies upon the more organized regulatory neural mechanisms of the attachment figure to regulate her own internal states and external behavioral responses-i.e., her affect³-at a time when her own regulatory neural structures-particularly the orbitofrontal cortex-are in nascent form. (While the researchers use such terms as "biological synchronicity" (Schore, 2000) and "limbic resonance" (Amini et al., 1996), the sci-fi image of "mind-melding" isn't far off the mark!) Even more amazing-and of lifelong importance-is that over the course of the thousands of mother-child "tuning encounters" that occur in the early months and years of a child's life, the circuitry of the child's orbitofrontal cortex (which is fundamental to his social and emotional functioning) is being laid down according to the model provided by the attachment figure. The profound, extensive impact of this attuned attachment relationship upon the very essence and core of the growing individual's personality is asserted in the title of one of the seminal texts by neuroscientist Allan Schore: *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self* (Schore, 1999). So what is eminently clear at the dawn of the 21st century is that secure attachment isn't simply the optimal context for healthy development-it is the development! Just as the infant uses the nourishment of his mother's milk to build his tissue and bones, he uses the attachment relationship to build areas of his brain that are critical to his future social-emotional functioning, particularly the orbitofrontal cortex. Attachment, then, is a basic kind of developmental nourishment. And thus its corruption-through neglect, maternal narcissism, abuse or other forms of relational wounding and chronic misattunement-I have named malattachment. Personality Disorders as Adaptive Responses to Malattachment In the course of Pearl's story and the companion essays, what emerges in starkly undeniable terms is a powerful nexus of the intergenerational nature of personality and mood disorders: the poorly organized emotional functioning of a mother that is her legacy to her daughter, then that daughter's legacy to her own children, and on and on the circularity of crippled social-emotional capacity goes. What Joseph Chilton Pearce wrote over thirty years ago is now "proven" at the level of neurobiology: Children cannot become what you tell them to be, they can only become what you are (Pearce, 1977). Nature's "model imperative," as Pearce tells us, demands that at each stage of development in the child, a model of what is possible must exist in the environment in order for that child to optimally unfold the intelligences of that evolutionary stage (Pearce, 2002). In the absence of the optimum, however, the human being is stunningly

equipped with ways to psychically and physically survive. Thus, an exploration is unfolded of personality "disorders"-primarily narcissistic, which often "blurs" diagnostically into borderline-as an adaptive survival strategy in the face of thwarted attachment. This stands in direct harmony with a handful of theorists who apply an attachment perspective to personality disorders (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; de Zulueta, 1999)-or, as one team terms them, "disorders of interpersonal relatedness" (Widiger and Frances cited in Lyddon & Sherry, 2001). Many now express the opinion that labels such as narcissistic or borderline personality disorder are "charged with pejorative meaning" and frequently used in the mental health professions as "little more than a sophisticated insult" (Herman, 1997, p. 123). In that spirit, and inspired by Ivey's more compassionate term "developmental personality style" (cited in Lyddon & Sherry, 2001) over the conventional "personality disorder," I have coined the term "defensive personality style." This harmonizes well with Alice Miller's classic exploration of these styles, which she saw "less as an illness than as a tragedy" (Miller, 1981, p. xvi). It articulates such personality constellations not as "disorders," or "flaws," but rather, unique ways a person has learned to adapt to and survive the pain of insecure or disorganized attachments and the rejection, abandonment, or abuse inherent in them. The key word here is "unique"; there is perhaps no realm of psychological diagnostics rife with more ambiguities and either/ors than defensive personality styles and their complex variety of presentations. A review of literature on narcissism alone turns up something rather like the proverbial Chinese menu, where an individual may display some narcissistic traits from column A, none from column B, and almost every trait from column C, with the resulting personality style unique among exponential possibilities. Various theorists likewise vary and diverge in their characterizations of narcissistic personality styles. While the lack of diagnostic and descriptive precision in the literature makes an exploration of these styles a somewhat "slippery" endeavor, we do well to take Judith Viorst's admonition, to remember that "each of these names can be used as a way of talking about distortions of self and self-image. Each of these names is attached to slightly different but often overlapping descriptions of damage that has been done to the private 'I'" (Viorst, 1986, p. 50). I refer to them collectively as the self struggle.

The Challenge of a Frontier Paradigm The Pre- and Perinatal Paradigm: Critical lifelong development, including consciousness and learning, begins at conception-perhaps even before-and forms a basic foundation for how individuals experience and relate to self, to others and to the world. Moreover, our "womb ecology" and "world ecology" are reflections of one another. At the heart of my dissertation beats the pre- and perinatal paradigm, woven from decades of theoretical and clinical research revealing that we are powerfully affected by the earliest circumstances of our lives, including the nature and circumstances of conception, gestation, and birth-which for the adoptee Pearl laid her foundations of separation particularly deep. The idea that a growing fetus could be affected by the circumstances of its conception (Baker & Baker, 1986), for example, is as foreign a concept to most folk as are the quantum principles to which a growing scientific elite is privy. The understanding of how profoundly the lifelong physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of their babies can be affected between conception and birth is simply not accessible to most people at this point in time. For the health of individuals and society in general, it is imperative that this change. A pediatrician was quoted (anonymously, in the 1998 annual report of "NOCIRC," a circumcision education organization) as saying, "If [pre- and perinatal sentience] is true, I would have to take a gun and shoot myself." Here is a bleak and strident example of the kind of resistance that leading-edge educators, researchers and clinicians meet when they attempt to convey the subtler, less visible aspects of early human (i.e., pre- and perinatal) development. As biophysicist Beverly Rubik writes, commenting on the challenges facing frontier scientists, people faced with data that doesn't fit their world view feel threatened on many levels-professional, social, personal (1996). In the case of the above pediatrician, not only is his professional and intellectual identity challenged but he is faced with acknowledging the pain he has inflicted upon countless babies through such procedures as unanesthetized newborn circumcisions and surgeries. This is where the compassion of the pre- and perinatal educator must come in: this is not about guilt, this is not about blame, this is not about tallying up all of the horrible things we have done to fetuses and babies because we simply did not recognize the true

nature of their (and our) consciousness. Let's shift perspectives ever so slightly, but profoundly: We were all babies. We were all carried in wombs, warm or ambivalent, nurturing or rejecting. We were all born, raggedly or magnificently, or maybe just routinely. We all have our stories. It is my thesis that despite the inroads that some pre- and perinatal pioneers have made into the public consciousness (e.g., Verny, Chamberlain, Odent, Leboyer), the pre- and perinatal paradigm may be most readily conveyed-in other words, conveyed in such a way as to inspire a fundamental consciousness shift-by means that strongly engage the whole brain, the whole person. I believe that education about pre- and perinatal realities may best be accomplished in the same way healing on this level is often accomplished-experientially (e.g. House, 2000; Noble, 1993; Schaef, 1992). People must either have an experience of their own primal material, or vividly experience someone else's, to even begin to allow the stirrings of possibility to enter consciousness. Thus emerged the conception of my dissertation as an experiential document-a novel, the story of Pearl, a contemporary woman, and her search for her connection to life. It was my objective that this story be an entertaining, compelling set of windows through which readers might enter uncharted aspects of their own deeper lives, while also coming to understand, through a gentle, compassionate process of unfolding events, the deep significance, validity, and vitality of the preand perinatal paradigm. Pearl's unusually extreme story of malattachment serves as a kind of magnifying glass through which we might gain insights into more subtle circumstances of bruised attachment. And though Pearl's multiple maternal abandonments represent a concoction of variables that makes it impossible to reach tidy conclusions of causation-"Was her trauma from being carried in an ambivalent womb, or from being relinquished, or from being adopted by such damaged parents?"-it is via these very questions that Pearl's story illuminates. (And one of the questions that hovers throughout is, indeed, can there ever be tidy explanations of meaningful causation within a human life, when, as suggests Randolph Severson (1994), "what is measurable about humanity is never as important as what is, in and of its very essence, immeasurable"?) The role of each essay is to, first-in the opening of each essay-effect a phenomenological reduction of that novel chapter's essences; and second, open up Pearl's experience to the light of multidisciplinary perspectives, current research, and the synthesizing gaze-to bring to her story the comfort of unfolded meanings that Pearl herself could not do within the confines of her bound up heart and untraveled intellect. MALATTACHMENT AND THE SELF STRUGGLE: ESSAY ONE ...What kind of love are you on? -Aerosmith We meet Pearl nearly one year into her experience of motherhood, on a day when turbulent and conflicting impulses within her psyche reach critical mass. The three thematic images emerging in this chapter are basic and primal, and they each have a double hold on Pearl. First, there is the gaping pit of need, which Pearl clearly carries within herself as her own mother's legacy of neglect. She unconsciously projects this morass of "unmeetable needs" onto her own son, and then fears its bottomlessness-and thus fears him. Simply being with her baby with no distraction threatens to engulf Pearl with the annihilating recognition on her own bottomless pit of need. Secondly, there is the image of rending, of tearing apart; to be so endlessly needed feels to Pearl as if it is ripping her apart. And third, her struggle with the "ever-present, gnashing conflict of my two deepest impulses-to attach and to pull away." So here, then, are three images/themes that drive this story of a woman for whom mothering tears her open, then urges her to wholeness: the empty well⁴, the rending at her core, and the connection/disconnection binary. These correspond to the triadic constellation of "diagnoses" that elegantly apply to Pearl: depression, narcissism, and attachment disruption⁵. Beginning with the work of John Bowlby in the 50s and 60s, it has been made clear that babies and young children need the consistent presence of one or more adults with whom they can be attached (Bowlby, 1973). Such close and secure contact conferred various survival protections through the millennia of pre-industrial evolution (Hrdy, 1999); and for the past half-century we have understood attachment as the optimal psycho-social developmental context, not simply for physical survival but for emotional health. Ainsworth, Main, and other post-Bowlby researchers extended the work, elucidating a spectrum of attachment styles, expressing heightened concerns for those children displaying ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized attachment (Green & Piel, 2002; Hrdy, 1999). At the dawn of the 21st century, leading-

edge science reveals attachment as not simply a context for healthy psychosocial growth, but also as a basic mode of not simply psycho-social but neurological development (Amini et al., 1996; Schore, 2002; Siegel, 2002).⁷ When infants and parents engage in the kind of mutually attuned, face-to-face, gaze-to-gaze, I-laugh-then-you-laugh encounters that optimally come naturally and instinctively, it is now believed that the immature affect regulatory system of the infant's brain falls in step with that of the adult and over time wires itself in emulatory fashion. Schore, Siegel, and Amini's group (independent of one another, and citing almost exclusively separate references) have collated a massive body of research that articulates a new and stunning view of the psychobiological/psychoneurological processes and implications of the infant's and child's early attachment relationships. A mother holds her infant on her lap facing her and makes a smiling face. He smiles and kicks with delight. She coos and he squeals. She bends toward him making an "outboard motor" noise and he pumps his legs and his arms and squeals more loudly, then turns his head away. The mother makes a calm "ohhhh," sound, and the intensity of their "conversation" begins to de-escalate. When the baby looks back at her she giggles again, and away they go once more. This scene of a mother engaging her infant in a kind of reciprocal series of cooing, giggling, sighing and squealing can be found everywhere around the world, across all strata of race, religion, socio-economic or technological circumstance. Neuroscience now realizes that the infant brain is designed to be molded by the environment; the huge spurts in brain growth that take place in the first two years of life potentiate experience-dependent maturation. And neuroscience has joined forces with the attachment theorists in the past decade to find that the most critical environmental variable is not mobiles decorated with extra high-contrast black-and-white nonsense, or data on the screen of a "lapware" computer designed for baby; rather, it is the attachment relationship between the infant and the mother (or other consistently available adult caregiver.) For instance, a newborn's neural circuitry is wired and primed at birth for engaging its adult caregiver. Her vision system is programmed to attend to and process specific types of patterns: she prefers curves to straight lines, strong contrasts of light and dark, and acute angles to obtuse angles. She is captivated by movement occurring inside a distinct frame. "When you add up all these innate preferences," writes infant psychologist Daniel Stern in *Diary of a Baby*, "they almost spell F-A-C-E" (Stern, 1998, p. 48). Playful mother/baby encounters like the one described above are actually highly organized "dialogues": mothers and infants synchronize the intensity of their affective behavior within lags of split seconds, making it an interactive matrix in which both partners match states and then simultaneously adjust their social attention, stimulation, and accelerating arousal in response to the partner's signals. This "microregulation" continues until the baby averts his gaze to regulate the potentially disorganizing effect of the intensity of positive emotion. The mother takes her cue and backs off, reducing her stimulation. She then waits for her baby's signal for reengagement. It is a dance between them that is immediate, instinctive, effortless. Hopefully. These "affect-regulating" transactions involve another, more hidden "conversation"-between the baby's relatively unorganized limbic structures and the adult's (hopefully) well-organized affect-regulating limbic system. The baby essentially uses the regulating abilities of the adult to manage his own affective states. "It is a biologically-based communication system that involves individual organisms directly with one another: the individuals in spontaneous communication constitute literally a biological unit" (Buck cited in Schore, 2002). Moreover, over time, and the hundreds and thousands of repeated such dances-in the bath, in the nursing chair, on the changing table, in the highchair-the infant's own affect-regulating system develops in such a way as to echo his partner's. As Schore puts it rather plainly, "The mother is downloading emotion programs into the infant's right brain. The child is using the output of the mother's right hemisphere as a template for the imprinting, the hard wiring, of circuits in his own right hemisphere that will come to mediate his expanding affective capacities, an essential element of his emerging personality" (2002, p. 258). Thus, attachment as a basic and essential form of nourishment. Amini et al. highlight the fact that the need for shared limbic regulation isn't limited to infants or children. They point out that "a number of researchers in this area [which they cite as Field 1985; Hofer 1984; Kraemer 1992; Reite and Capitanio 1985] have proposed a series of closely similar conceptualizations of attachment centering around

the proposition that social mammals are fundamentally incapable of maintaining basic neurophysiologic homeostasis on their own. Instead, in the view of these researchers, the nervous system of social mammals is constituted by a number of open homeostatic loops, which require external input from other social mammals in order for internal homeostasis to be maintained. The manner in which this input is achieved is through social contact and biobehavioral synchrony attained with attachment figures. In this view, then, the attachment relationship is postulated to be a crucial organizing regulator of normal neurophysiology for social mammals" (Amini et al., 1996). And in their popular bestseller *A General Theory of Love*, the same group points out that a baby's physiology is "maximally open-loop," and that mammals who grow up in the absence of the coordinating influence of limbic regulation are "jagged and incomplete" (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2000). This description fits Pearl achingly well. The Implicit Lessons of Attachment We see that Pearl's year-old son is already demonstrating signs of his own insecure attachment to her, in his disinclination to contentedly and confidently explore and play for periods of time on his own. Rather, his awareness of Pearl's ambivalence, conflicts, and frequent energetic absence seeds a basic insecurity about whether or not she is really there for him-and thus, according to Pearl he needs to return "to me to me to me." Pearl's depressed affect, unattuned responses and occasional displays of barely contained rage are, in fact, clear-cut risk factors for Kyle's own malattachment (Amini et al., 1996; Coyl, Roggman, & Newland, 2002; Goodman & Gotlib, 1999). Indeed, Ainsworth's work with the Adult Attachment Interview found that what most reliably predicts secure attachment in a child is the ability of that child's parent to tell a coherent narrative about his or her own early history, i.e., his or her own story of attachment/malattachment (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). At the outset of the novel, Pearl is still wrestling with disjointed pieces of a story that do not yet make sense to her, yet are still "running" her with their primitive, implicit lessons of malattachment. Indeed, attachment is a series of fundamental lessons (Kaplan, 2002). Along with developing his own self-regulating abilities during these early months, the infant and young child is also performing a most complicated learning endeavor. Given that his right hemisphere predominates during his first three years, the predominant nature of his memory and learning is implicit rather than explicit.⁹ Non-verbal, non-cognitive, and outside the realm of conscious awareness, implicit learning and memory predominate during the primal period (prenatal to three years.) In implicit learning, over the course of repeated experiences, the brain-mainly the right hemisphere-unconsciously extracts the rules that underlie them. "Such knowledge develops with languorous ease and inevitability, stubbornly inexpressible, never destined for translation into words" (Lewis et al., 2000). It is this kind of silent learning, taking place over the days, weeks, months and years of the attachment relationship, that engraves patterns of attachment-via the machine-like encoding process of neural memory-deep within the individual, basic beliefs about herself, and models of and rules for expectations of others: Others care for me. I am loveable. I can trust. My needs are attended to. Love feels good. Connection is safe. All is pretty much right with the world. Or not. Dubbed by Bowlby "internal working models," such lessons act like templates to shape the person's future, as the individual seeks out situations and relationships in which those beliefs, models and rules fit, feel like "home"-be it a happy home or an empty home. Pearl's exaggerated neediness in her friendship with Arlene, a busy, important, powerful woman, is an example of the kind of relational templates carved by her early implicit learning: I need the attention of a woman who is too busy to give it to me. In the bittersweet fashion so often found in nature's cyclic evolutionary urging, it is exactly the kinds of relationships that originally wounded us, to which we will gravitate over and over and over. Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in assessing the variables influencing prospects for war with Iraq, was given to referring to "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns." The most insidious of all, however, is what I would characterize as the unknown known, that which is learned in the stealthy realm of implicit processes, and as such is not available for conscious processing and reflection but rather guides behavior without impinging upon consciousness (Amini et al., 1996). This is an important aspect of Pearl's experience and unfolding journey of awakening. In light of her memories in the novel's first chapter, it seems that Pearl's early learning experiences about relationship yielded a barren stretch of longing and emptiness, a deep and gaping well. She is doing the

best she can to reach down and scrape the cold edges of that empty well, dredging for scraps to fund the mothering of her own son. The synchronous dance of attachment, the limbic resonance and regulation that should come so easily and effortlessly, extracts a great toll from Pearl. Indeed, it exceeds her capacity; she fully consciously chooses to "mis-read" Kyle's cues, a deliberate misattunement that constitutes a micro-abandonment of her child. If this misattunement were an anomaly-because Pearl was simply having a bad day, or because the phone rang, or any of myriad other reasonable, transitory impediments to synchrony-and if she were to reconnect after the momentary lapse, what Kyle would learn is that interactive disruptions can be fixed, that the clouds pass and the sun comes out again. His emotional "repertoire" and resilience would in fact be enriched by these cycles of connection, failure, and repair (Tronick cited in Reynolds, 2003), which contribute to what anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy dubs "the elasticity of learned trust" (1999, p. 501). But Pearl is not even synchronous with her own feelings, so the hopes of her steady availability to synchronize with and regulate those of her baby are dim. It is this dissociation of actions from feeling that is a basic hallmark of the narcissistic personality (Lowen, 1985, p. 1). We see chilling glimpses of this narcissistic "automaton" feature in two telling moments this chapter: when Pearl takes time to wipe water spots from her shower door while Kyle cries for her first thing in the morning, and when she stops to adjust picture frames while taking a crying Kyle to his room for a nap. And we also see the first hints of Pearl's preoccupation with her image in the mirror-the quintessential narcissistic tableau, and one with poignant implications. Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés would say that Pearl is "instinct-injured" (1992). She is a "collapsed mother" sliding inexorably into that gaping pit, which Estes suggests happens to people during "an emotional replay of an old wounding, often an uncorrected and unaccounted-for injustice done to them when they themselves were children" (Estés, 1992, p. 177). Collapsing is where, when someone is angry with you, or acts in a way towards you that is quite negative, instead of remaining as an adult, with adult responses, one goes into a psychic regression, and gets hooked, so to speak, as on a fishhook, on very old feelings-of being worthless, unprotected, not knowing what to do next, wishing to be invisible, wishing to even die, in order to avoid the terrible pain of rejection and separation that one feels. Collapsing is where, instead of staying adult and in the moment, in the present, one goes on an instantaneous journey into the horrors of the past, and reacts from that particular place. (Estes, 1990) Something essential, and essentially human, has been corrupted in Pearl. When it happened, and whether it can be repaired, remains to be seen as the story unfolds. For now, Pearl is suffering the dual cut of the wounded-mother knife: the agony of her own parched capacity to mother her son, and the painful awakening of her own long-dormant woundedness and disconnection. In his study of four depressed new mothers (who themselves had been raised by borderline mothers) Michael Trout (1991) notes that these women "both yearned for and vigorously defended against" attachments. He goes on to articulate the wrenching catch-22 suffered by mothers for whom their babies represent both edges of the blade: on the one hand the baby has the power to instill in the mother a sense of powerlessness and "no-way-to-win inadequacy," while on the other, the baby awakens in the mother her own banished needs and pain, causing further entrenchment of relational defenses and depression. Note Pearl's longing description of catatonia at chapter's end-"To just sit and not function, not do for anybody"; it sounds like one of the central privileges of being a baby, privileges the hypervigilant infant Pearl never enjoyed. Pearl is still hypervigilant, one ear, one antenna always cocked for the first signs that Kyle is distressed-which would mean she was failing. One of the reasons that Pearl finds nursing such a refuge is that it reflects back to her the "proof that she is doing a good job, which jibes with the image she must prop up at all costs. Not only do Kyle's expressions of upset threaten to unhinge the door to Pearl's ancient, banished feelings, they clash with the fragile psychic lifeline that is her image of herself as a good mother. Breastfeeding offers me predictable pauses in the daily treadmill. Here is something that no one but I can do for Kyle so of course no one can do it better. It's the one mother thing, the most ideal mother thing, that I can do perfectly, and imagine!, I can do it with absolutely no effort, no angst, no quiet panic over, "Oh, God, what do I need to do now, what does he want?" For the moment there is relief. Relief from my vague but persistent fears of incompetence, relief from the

trying, always trying, to do better. Do what better, I can't quite name. I just know that I rarely feel respite from this thin but steady pressure that seems to define my life since I became a mother. Blessedly, Kyle's little body sinks contentedly into mine, my milk flowing effortlessly, the chatter in my head can quiet and for these few moments I can surrender to the soft embrace of our nursing chair. How many hours I have spent in this spot over the past year, sucking up these scattered moments of peace like nectar. These are times when mother and child would seem to be most intimately connected, but instead I flee, taking refuge in my archives of unencumbered times. As Kyle pats my open hand, does he feel me slip away? We see in this last line Pearl's abandonment of her baby at the energetic level. A scant amount appears in the literature about the subtleties of physical versus complete presence of the mother for the child, but child psychotherapist Diane Reynolds notes the "psychic homesickness" that may well ensue for an infant whose mother offers her breast to soothe, yet remains "disengaged from her infant's longing for a sturdier psychological holding" (2003). Indeed, the mindbody psychotherapy literature supports (Rosenberg, Rand, & Asay, 1985; Sorce & Emde, 1981) that a baby would be supremely sensitive to abandonment at this level. And infant mental health studies show that to have a mother's physical presence without her psychic presence-e.g., her blank, unexpressive face-proves to be even more distressing for infants than her complete absence (e.g. Field, 1986). It makes sense that this kind of relational double-message would be crazymaking for someone like a baby, who veritably lives in the realm of the subtle. So, then, one of Kyle's "stealth lessons" of malattachment-Mommy is there, but not there.

Footnote 1 This is a line that Meryl Streep's character says to Gene Hackman's character in the movie *Postcards From the Edge*, based on the troubled mother-daughter relationship between Carrie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds. 2 It bears noting that the term homeostasis-which means "the ability or tendency of an organism or a cell to maintain internal equilibrium by adjusting its physiological processes"-is giving way on the frontiers of biology to the concept of homeodynamics, in which the mechanistic notion of stasis is supplanted by the more holistic, integral one of dynamics. When the organism experiences a stressor, which may be emotional, physical, or chemical, it never returns to the original physiological balance, but (ideally) learns to integrate the new information and moves to a new steady state. This is homeodynamic regulation. Because of its still-accepted usage and immediate recognizability amongst scientists and lay readers alike, I will continue to use the term homeostasis, trusting that the reader will bear this evolution in mind! 3 Judith Solomon contributes an excellent understanding to the distinguishing features of affect, emotion, and feeling-terms that are often used interchangeably in the psychological literature. Affects, of which there are a limited repertoire present from birth (or even before), are undefined global sensations related to experiences with bodily functions-physical comfort or pain deriving from nurturing and/or deprivation experiences between infant and caretaker. These are basic to the development of the core self during the early months of life. At first they are not psychological events but purely biological responses; however, they quickly become linked to encoded memory traces and become the building blocks of emotions, responses that incorporate patterns of seeing, hearing, smelling and touching. Emotions are formed during interactional experiences that include some awareness of self and other. Feelings combine emotions and affects with cognitive processes, which can begin when the infant is capable of symbolic thought-generally by around 18 to 24 months (Solomon, 1989, p. 82-82). The continued use of the term "affect" when discussing adult experience, can be seen to reflect the regressive nature of the response, in which the adult reacts to certain stimuli in the archaic, infantile manner, unresourced by intellectual or self-conscious capacities. 4 I am indebted to Dr. Wendy McCord for the image of the empty well, which is elucidated later in the dissertation. 5 I prefer the term "disruption" to the conventionally-used "disorder;" in Siegel's words, "attachment is a relationship measure, not a feature of the child alone" (Siegel, 2002). 7 Since these groups independently arrive at similar characterizations of the neurobiology of attachment and its implications, I will only include citations for points on which one or another of them stands alone in certain assertions, or when I highlight particularly provocative notions. 9 Other terms for implicit memory are procedural memory, behavioral memory, and Freud's rather lyrical perceptual image. References REFERENCES Amini, F., Lewis, T., Lannon,

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