

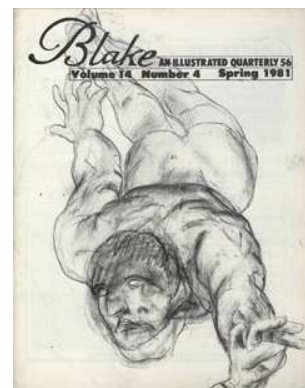
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Simon Stuart, *New Phoenix Wings: Reparation in Literature*

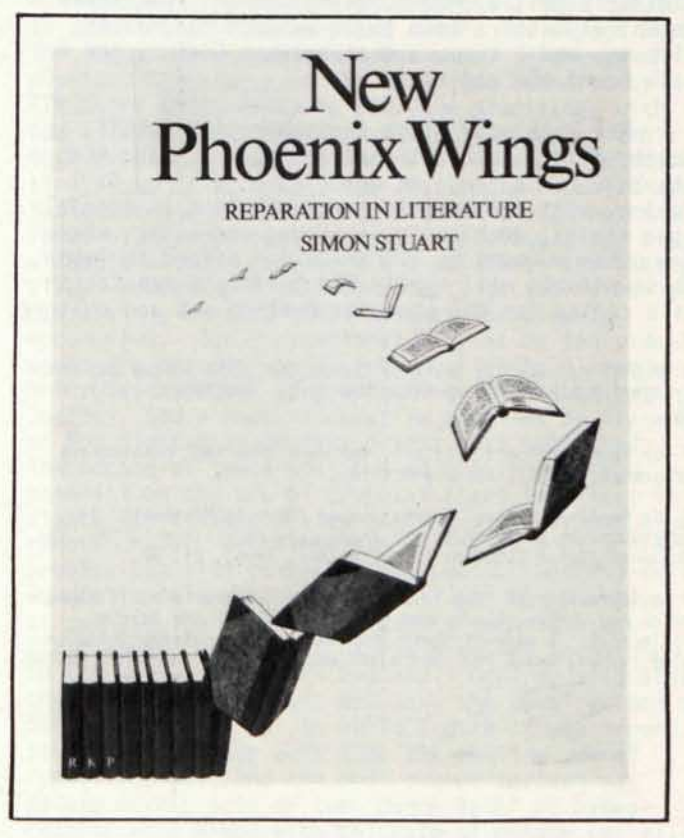
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Reviewed by Thomas R. Frosch.



The confrontation of psychoanalysis and literary Romanticism is a particularly challenging and intriguing one. On the one hand, with its interest in subjectivity, its attraction to memory, fantasy, and dream, its intuitive grasp of unconscious process, its fascination with the primitive and with extreme states of mind and feeling, and its commitment to the theme of human desire and its vicissitudes, Romanticism would seem to demand exactly the kind of illumination a psychoanalytic approach offers. On the other hand, perhaps nothing is more effectively and meaningfully hostile to the idealizations of Romanticism than the characteristic demythologizing force of Freudian analysis; the psychoanalytic description of the neurotic is often a telling negative portrayal of the Romantic hero. Indeed, Freud's work can easily be seen as both the culmination of a century of Romanticism and a reaction against it. For the literary critic who finds psychoanalytic models valid and compelling and who is at the same time intellectually and emotionally sympathetic to Romanticism, the problem is to bring Romanticism and psychoanalysis together in a way that respects both. Such a project, exemplified in the work of Harold Bloom, Thomas Weiskel, Richard Onorato, and others, seems to me the most important recent development in Romantic studies.

When it comes to Blake, the problem is especially difficult. First, Blake offers an abundance of diverse Romantic attitudes; his characters include both "good" and "bad" Romantics: the Sunflower, Thel, Orc, Oothoon, Los, the Devil of

The Marriage, the poet's own persona at different moments, even Urizen constitute together a virtual encyclopedia of Romanticism. Blake's poetic universe is powered and pervaded by a general Romanticism, a desire for paradise; and his on-going poetic adventure centers upon his attempts to refine and shape that desire. It is easy for psychoanalysis to help Blake criticize the negative Romanticism, but how is it to handle the positive? Second, Blake's own systematic charting of the psyche, precisely because it has numerous points of similarity to Freud's, is a formidable defense against attempts to apply psychoanalytic models to his work. And sure enough, most psychoanalytic references in Blake studies show how Blake embodies or anticipates Freud's theories, rather than how psychoanalytic techniques of interpretation can open up an unconscious dimension in Blake's own words. A third difficulty is that Blake does not lay himself bare, like Wordsworth, who virtually begs to be analyzed. As compatible as Blake may be thematically with an ethic of subjectivity and self-expression, poetically he belongs primarily to an older, more openly literary tradition; he is a writer of calculated guises, of ironies and dramatizations.

Simon Stuart's *New Phoenix Wings* is a psychoanalytic study of literature that respects poetic idealization (customarily identifying idealization with sentimentality and falsification, the author writes, we tend "to pass over that area in which an idealised view can penetrate an essential reality") and that includes an extensive chapter on Blake. Stuart's approach is based on the striking and

controversial work of Melanie Klein, whose theories have been highly influential in England, more so than in the United States. Klein believed that infants in their first six months experience toward the object that dominates their lives, the breast, not only positive feelings but also intense feelings of aggression, and she identified these sadistic impulses with the death-instinct. Culminating during the experience of weaning, the aggression is expressed primarily in unconscious destructive fantasies (the derivatives of which can be observed later) toward the internalized image of the breast, as well as the internalized image of both parents. Furthermore, in his fantasies of hatred and assault, the infant fears that the object of his fury will retaliate in kind. This is the paranoid-schizoid stage, schizoid because of the conflict between the satisfying, pleasure-giving image of the breast and the frustrating, hostile image of the breast. It is the persecuting inner object, rather than actual parental discipline, that for Klein is the source of the Superego.

Tormented by fears both of his own aggressive impulses and of the persecuting enemy those impulses have created, the infant enters a stage of severe depression, in which he is dominated by a sense of loss. But the depression is countered by the growing realization that the external parents do not behave like the internal fantasy parents, that despite his own aggression and the sadism of the internal parents, the external ones still remain loving. The infant is then moved to rebuild his inner world, which has been shattered by sadism, and he passes into a stage of reparation, dominated by fantasies of healing the damaged parents. This impulse of reparation, Stuart emphasizes, is the source of art; to create is to recreate, to rebuild the lost or fragmented internal object.

Crucial to the process of reparation is a new ability to form symbols, substitutes for what the infant has lost. In Klein's treatment of sublimation, when the image of the breast becomes overwhelmingly fraught with conflict and anxiety, the infant forms a symbolic substitute for it; the anxieties of the depressive stage thus drive the subject to sublimations which, ideally, resolve the anxieties, leading to new interests and activities. In this way, the death-instinct becomes the power behind the creation of "life-enhancing, life-preserving activities." The alternative to reparation and symbol-formation is stultification, pathological withdrawal, impotence of all types; "We must construct our symbols," writes Stuart, "or die."

Stuart examines these issues in the work of a mythopoetic poet, Blake; a subjective, confessional poet, Wordsworth; a novelist, Dostoevsky; and a dramatist, Shakespeare. But first he explores Kleinian patterns in less sophisticated forms, in nursery rhymes and in compositions written by his own sixth-form students. This chapter--for me, the best part of the book--features an engaging discussion of his method of teaching "Goosey, goosey gander." From the innocence of children's literature, he moves to Blakean Innocence and Experience, juxtaposing "A Little Boy Lost" to a

student fantasia about a homosexual rape on an altar by a father-priest, to show the Oedipal intricacies within Blake's theme of religious and social oppression. But where is the reparation in this poem? It appears, Stuart claims, in the spectrum of colors surrounding the poem on Blake's illuminated plate, a covenantal rainbow, which both recalls the lost oneness at the source of the spectrum and also is emblematic of the restitution made by aesthetic form itself. The latter point becomes a major theme in the book. Whereas comic literature manifests reparation in both content and form, tragic literature does so purely in form. For Freud, the formal properties of literature offer a kind of forepleasure, which bribes us to accept the author's fantasy. For Bloom, concentrating on the writer, rather than the audience, formal properties, as ratios of misreading, are aggressive transformations of a prior text. For Stuart, we experience a feeling of reparation in our appreciation of rhyme, meter, sound, and verbal patterning. Successful poetry doesn't incite us to fulfill the forbidden impulses it takes as its subject matter but transports us to a state of Thomistic contemplation of aesthetic wholeness and universal meaning. For Stuart, formal elements embody the Ego's ordering of "crude Id impulses"; but he typically underplays the magical fantasy involved in that ordering. Formal elements can often be seen as rooted in primal experiences and impulses; the Thomistic stasis can be regarded as a reincarnation of the infant's experience of the good object; it may also be that some need for obstacle, resistance, or counter-pressure enters into the artist's own experience of form: witness Frost and his tennis net. In different ways, Vico, Buber, and Northrop Frye have pointed out that magic, fantasy, and, in effect, Id impulses play a part in the process of poetic structuring, as well as in the material to be structured. In any event, Stuart does not convince me that "A Little Boy Lost" is not, in the terms of Stephen Dedalus' Thomistic aesthetic, primarily a pornographic poem, one which is calculated to incite us to outrage, one in which the function of aesthetic form is to sharpen the point.

Stuart's major section on Blake begins with a reading of *The Four Zoas* Night VIIa as an account of the origins of the creative imagination. The Night opens with the Oedipal entanglements of Orc and Urizen, in which it becomes clear that no hope for redemption can any longer be expected from the Id, hero of *The Marriage* but now as crippled as the Superego that oppresses it. The world of Orc and Urizen is the paranoid-schizoid world, ruled by the death-instinct. A way out can be found only through Los, or the Ego, but only if the Ego accepts the annihilation of its current, limited concept of itself as a wholly conscious, rational entity by acknowledging its own "forgotten, denied, split off, despised aspect," and especially its envy and jealousy, prime Kleinian effects in the early phases. The Spectre of Urthona, who both represents the despised aspect and argues for its acceptance, receives a more favorable presentation in Stuart than I have seen elsewhere. Once Los is inwardly healed, he turns with Enitharmon to the reparative work of creating "embodied semblances," or symbols,

for the other spectres of the fallen world; that is, Los and Enitharmon become the good internalized parents cooperating in the process of creation, rebuilding the world shattered by Orc and Urizen and by their own depressive anxieties, and the world of symbols they build is Golgonooza. In the vision of the Lamb of God clothed in Luvah's robes of blood that enters the episode at the end and that Anne Mellor has attacked as a conventional religious intrusion, Stuart sees an effective symbol of the process of reparation, in which the dead spectres, the shattered pieces of the world, are reborn; the Lamb is, in effect, a culminating symbol of the process of symbol-formation itself.

All this may sound somewhat formulaic, but it is much less so in Stuart's text than in my synopsis, and so far I find it a fine reading. At this point, however, Stuart makes the claim that Blake himself fails to achieve in the poetic form of VIIa the embodied semblance, the process of giving structure to the broken, that in his narrative is presented as the triumph of the life-instincts. Indeed, he relates Blake's epic style to the infant's sense of omnipotence, which, as a manic defense against depression, is an obstacle to true reparation. In *Jerusalem*, he concludes, Blakean form becomes even looser and more narcissistic; and he similarly censures *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* for its embodiment of a world-view and a poetics dominated by mere magic and an exaggerated sense of the worth of all the individual's products. Blake is at his best, by contrast, in the *Songs*, where he is writing in tight, traditional forms, shaping his impulses in the terms of a larger, anterior enterprise (he calls "A Little Boy Lost" a "great poem"). This is a stunningly retrogressive point, and T. S. Eliot's strictures on Blake, as well as his general aesthetic, are brought back to life to support it. Working with categories of Ernst Kris, Stuart develops opposed concepts of the artist as craftsman and as magician, the latter equated with the "bad artist" and the neurotic, and writes that the presence of the Romantic, inspired, and prophetic Bard "vitiates" many Blakean passages. At such times Blake lacks "classical impersonality."

Stuart's aesthetic categories and sympathies are remote from his Blakean material. Organic form has its abuses and failures--so too does classical or "traditional" form, as Blake was fond of pointing out--and Blake did not entirely escape such failures; but I doubt if Stuart's argument will give much pause for reconsideration to anyone who is convinced that Blake's epic style was a conscious, artful expansion of form accompanying and even necessitated by an expansion and deepening of statement and vision. More important, Stuart's sense of tradition is limited, for the epic style is indeed quite traditional; it belongs to a tradition of prophetic poetry, which has its own formal features and which includes the Bible and *Paradise Lost*, Blake's favorite books. There are references in Stuart that imply a partial acknowledgment that Blake's epic style is traditional in its own way; but if a psychology of art is truly required by its principles to reject an entire tradition of style that writers themselves have found useful throughout the history of literature, then the psychology needs to be

revised. We may accept that certain powerful and skillful works of art exemplify narcissistic, omnipotent, and magical conceptions of the self and the world--however, we then might question not whether such art is therefore rendered invalid but, as Bloom has done, whether poetic excellence is the same thing as the wisdom of daily life. Romantic magic and imagination and the character of the Romantic poet-prophet require a cooler psychological analysis than Stuart gives them.

Stuart proceeds to analyze the *Songs* as successful embodied semblances. He reads the "Introduction" to *Innocence* attractively as a poem that represents the poetic process in terms of conception (piping down the valleys wild), gestation (from piping to singing to writing), and birth (the child, at first inside the piper, with the cloud above his head as both a placenta and a thought-bubble, vanishes when the song is externalized in a book). Procreation and poetic process are identified with incarnation, since the child, the song, the song's subject (the lamb), Innocence, and, by implication, Jesus are jointly conceived and brought into the world in the poem. In "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found," dew and mire represent both the material world, into which, in a Neoplatonic reading, the soul descends, and also the urine and feces of the child's assault against the parents. Losing involves destroying. But the real parents, as opposed to the inner ones, continue to be ever nigh and caring, and reparation is achieved. It would appear that since the new father is a sublime one (God) the concept of reparation needs to be supplemented here by the concept of Family Romance.

"The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* receives the most provocative of these readings. The essence of the poem for Stuart is not its social protest but its portrayal of the inner experience of oppression. The shaving of Tom's head is castration; cleaning chimneys and sleeping in soot is an "anal diversion" opposed to the genital strivings expressed in the dream of rising to the clouds. Tom learns to endure temporarily an onslaught of the death-instinct without being emotionally destroyed by it; his genital potency remains inviolate despite the attacks on it. But a fuller reading would have to account for the element of pathetic rationalization in the poem, as well as the fact that the sweeps' entering the chimneys implies active homosexuality, not passive like the altar fantasia to which Stuart compares the poem. We can expand upon Stuart's reading as follows. First, the poem begins with the death of the mother; that is, when the child is weaned, he enters a state of persecution. The poem ends with the promise of phallic liberation; in the meantime, the child undergoes a severe detainment at the anal stage. Second, while cleaning other people's chimneys might well be, symbolically, the nadir of humiliation, it could also represent a destructive homosexual assault against the father; latent aggression appears within the portrayal of helpless suffering. Third, in Klein the child is fascinated by the contents of the mother's body, which in his fantasies include other children, penises, and excreta (in the paired poem the child himself is "a little black thing," a piece of soot), and the anus is frequently in the child's fantasies the place of birth; the sweeps thus enact

the epistemophilic and destructive fantasy of entering the mother's body, exploring it, and robbing (liberating) its contents, while they also suffer the retaliatory fantasy of being swallowed and destroyed by that body, assimilated to the fragments of dirt within it, locked in coffins of black. But the liberation of the sweeps, the resurrection of the dead, is also a bringing forth of life from excrement, which Irvine Schiffer in *The Trauma of Time* describes as one of the radical fantasies of the artistic process. The poem thus gives us a comprehensive vision of psychic conflict in the mode of anality; but it goes even further to merge psychology and social criticism, suggesting how a concept of reparation can be exploited and how symbol-formation, in the transcendent genital paradise, can be overly drastic. If the child behaves well under the oppressive regime, he will be rewarded after death. In this poem, the life-instinct, having transformed the death-instinct, is then subtly co-opted by its adversary.

For Stuart, Innocence and Experience represent not childhood and maturity but the idealized breast and the persecuting breast, "the two contrary states of the human soul." While the *Songs of Innocence* are set in the stage of depressive anxiety and typically conclude in reparation, the *Songs of Experience* paradoxically focus on the earlier paranoid-schizoid stage, which does not contain the potentiality of reparation; here the life-instinct, with its conversion of disintegration into beauty, is present in poetic form alone. In "The Sunflower" Stuart sees the obverse of the successful process of creation he discerns in "Piping down the valleys wild." He reconciles the apparently contradictory impulses dramatized in the poem toward sexual fulfillment and transcendence by arguing that sexual desire is treated in Blake as the "symbolic enactment of a quest which supersedes it . . . erection [is the image] of resurrection." He expands upon this by reference to Donne's "The Ecstasy," in which, as Stuart has it, a psychosexual reality appears behind the concepts of Platonic Ideal and Christian Incarnation and in which soul and body find a saving reciprocity; in Stuart's reading, "as the physical uses the . . . immaterial for physical ends, so the immaterial must use the physical for ends transcending the physical." "The Sunflower" records a failure to understand the relation of the physical to the spiritual, a failure, then, of symbol-formation, of incarnation. This is a good reading, but to understand the uniquely Blakean treatment of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, one would have to take into account, first, Blake's theme that the visionary is not a separate realm from the bodily (as in Plato and orthodox Christianity) but an expansion of the bodily, and, second, a psychological, as opposed to thematic, analysis of Blake's deeply complex attitudes toward sexuality, woman, and nature.

Stuart's Wordsworth chapter is clearer and smoother than his Blake section, not only because the material is more readily amenable to his approach but even more because his discussion here actually begins with a psychological analysis of the poet's text rather than with a concept of the poet's work (the transcendent Blake) to which a psychological

analysis is, in effect, adapted. Chiefly interested in the way Wordsworth can "transform the substance of despair into creativity," Stuart asks how the poet can claim that such traumatic Oedipal episodes as the stolen boat scene in *The Prelude*, Book I, ultimately contribute to his growth and sense of well-being. Onorato's answer (still the best one for me) is that Wordsworth's imagination is driven by a need to deny traumatic effect, specifically that caused by his parents' deaths; but according to Stuart, Wordsworth's earliest experience, his pre-Oedipal innocence, his internalization of the good parents, is so firm and positive that the later conflicts of Experience can be not only survived but used to enriching effect. "So feeling comes in aid / Of feeling . . . if but once we have been strong." It is in this way that looking back at the past restores us. What also helps Wordsworth survive the depressive stage is his genius for symbol-formation. In his treatment of the Spot of Time in which Wordsworth visits the murderer's gibbet, Stuart shows how anxiety drives the poet from symbol to symbol in a series of sublimating equations--from the visionary dreariness of the childhood landscape to the golden glow perceived by the adult returning to the scene, for example, or from the letters of the murderer's name (torn bits of the mother's body) to the girl with the pitcher to "the loved one by my side." The capacity to fabricate embodied semblances in this way resolves the anxiety and leads to authentic growth.

Stuart also compares "Tintern Abbey" and the "Intimations Ode" as, respectively, an unconvincing and a successful attempt to resolve depressive anxiety over the loss of the good object. In "Tintern Abbey" anxiety and aggression are magically denied; the sense of persecution that emerges in other depressive passages--in, for example, Wordsworth's reflections on the Reign of Terror--is smothered beneath "The still, sad music of humanity." In the Ode, however, the source of depression is faced: the child perversely destroys his own happiness and integrity; we "provoke . . . the inevitable yoke." Such an acknowledgment validates the poem's movement from depression (the thought of grief, forgetfulness) to reparation (the timely utterance, remembrance).

In the final chapter it becomes apparent that Stuart's ultimate purpose is the forging of a synthesis of psychoanalysis, art, and religion, and it is on the third term that he now concentrates. Apparently sharing the yearning of Eliot for rites and symbols that are grounded in human reality and psychologically developing that desire, he looks through Christian myth and ritual to its pagan roots and, beyond, to the inner events of depressive mourning for the lost object and restitution, "an eternal rhythm of death and resurgence, impotence and potency, destruction and reparation." Both art and, in its symbolic rather than magical aspect, religion embody "the struggle of the life-instincts to find forms to celebrate their ever recurrent mourning of what is lost and rediscovery thereby of new life." He analyzes structures of rebirth in *Crime and Punishment* (studying the relation between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov) and *Much Ado About Nothing*, adding, in the latter case, a touch here

and there to previous discussions of rebirth in Shakespearean comedy: Hero is the destroyed and restored object; Don John manifests the infant's envious wish to spoil the power and greatness of the good object; the renunciation of self-sufficiency and superiority that brings Beatrice and Benedick together has its roots in the infant's relinquishing of the breast, a renunciation that is the basis of enriching sublimations. But the center of the chapter remains the quest for an effective symbol, "a hyper-verbal communication [that] may resort to words," as the soul does to the body in Donne, but that is finally a transcendent reality.

New *Phoenix Wings* demonstrates that the important work of Melanie Klein is worth the attention of students of literature; and Stuart is not a mere mechanical adapter of her theories but a reader whose approach to literature does show fineness and subtlety. His style, however, despite some eloquent passages is too often an obstacle: for example, "'Introduction' with 'Earth's Answer' *Experience*, like Coleridge's *Dejection* or Wordsworth in *The Prelude* I, records the disjunction of that bisexual process without the temporary conjunction of which the record could not exist." In his argument Stuart does not, in my view, use psychoanalytic criticism to maximal effect, tending to use it to open up a writer's vision of humanity and to demonstrate in general terms the Creative Process at work rather than to open up our vision of the particular sensibility constituted by the writer's words. Did the creative process have precisely the same meaning for both Blake and Shakespeare? Are the anxieties and the implicit attitudes toward parental images revealed in their texts identical? Except in the case of the openly subjective Wordsworth texts, I miss a sense of the individual inflection of the universal process.

It may be that different followers of Freud bear a special relationship to different authors. Ferenczi seems close to Wordsworth, for example, and the heretical Jung has been successfully used in conjunction with many writers in the romance mode. In Klein, the handling of aggression and its conversion into creativity is central. I would like to see Kleinian analyses of writers as divergent as Pope--with his aggressive satire, his virtually magical concern with form and craft, and perhaps his enemy-parents, Dulness and Tibbald-Cibber--and Shelley--with his massive transformations of aggression and his Prometheus devastating the world through Jupiter and then rebuilding it. As for Blake, anger and aggression certainly figure saliently in both his style and his poetic situations. But because of

Stuart's bias against the epic work, *New Phoenix Wings* doesn't fully answer the question of Klein's relevance. What about the study of jealousy and the battle against the death-instinct (Covering Cherub, Selfhood, Error, Satan) in *Jerusalem*? What about the bringing together of the parents (Milton and Ololon, Albion and Jerusalem) that dominates both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*? Here, far more than in the *Songs*, would come the test of Klein as a guide to Blake. I am grateful to Stuart for provoking such questions, and I do think his book makes a contribution to Blake studies. Still, it is important to observe how psychoanalysis can be used merely to give formidable authority to anterior aesthetic judgments. Here, surrounded by references to Eliot and Donne and by a Thomistic concept of form, Blake is subsumed into a poetic and religious tradition alien to his own, with predictable results in terms of aesthetic evaluation. Stuart has brought Blake and psychoanalysis together by taking him out of the Romantic, visionary line of English literature; more than analyzing Blake's Romanticism, he has eliminated it.

A broader issue is the exact nature of the voyage from impulse and experience to symbol and art. In Freud, that voyage involves a sacrifice; this is reaffirmed by Lacan. In Bloom, art is not a reparation for aggression, but aggression itself is at the source of the creative process; and in Bloom, too, denials and defenses are generators of the poetic imagination. Does poetry start with a reparation for a catastrophe or with the catastrophe itself? Throughout *New Phoenix Wings* Stuart stresses that in reparation the internal parents are recreated and brought together in sexual union; artistic creation involves an internally bisexual process, in which male and female elements, father and mother, are married. We might say that while in the paranoid-schizoid stage the infant suicidally destroys his own creators, in reparation he recreates himself by affirming his origins; he inwardly repeats his own creation. This is Coleridge's Primary Imagination, the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." *New Phoenix Wings* has much to offer on this phase of the poetic process. What it lacks is a vivid complementary account of the Secondary Imagination, which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate," in which aggression plays a role and the subject seeks not to repeat his origins but to remake them, even, in the most highly Romantic formulations, to be his own creator. For such an account, we would have to pass from reparation to the Oedipus Complex and the Family Romance.