

THE BODY

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The body: a surface on which events are inscribed [...] Genealogy, as an analysis of where things come from is thus situated at the point of articulation of the body and history. Its task is to show a body totally imprinted with history, and history destroying the body.

Michel Foucault

Gender is always a doing[.]

Judith Butler

I am honoured to introduce this issue of *Victorian Network*, which directs our attention to one of the most durable areas of inquiry in contemporary scholarship on Victorian literature and culture: the body. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are the period in which the body as we understand it is elaborated: modern medical models of the body are developed, modern political relations to the body are instantiated, and modern identities relations to class, race and gender are being inscribed.

The body is a bountiful topic. Over the last decades, study of the body that began with gender and bio-politics continued into explorations of materialism and ergonomic/economical concerns, evolution and industrialism, disease and health, sexuality, cyborgs, medical and legal history, and the new “neuro-humanities.” Of the many areas of research showing unabated vitality, two of the most fecund continue to be the earliest. Michel Foucault casts a long and justified shadow over the last several decades of scholarship on the body. Foucault’s explorations of the relation of power and surveillance to both representations and the lived experience of bodies in the modern period have been foundational for subsequent studies. His early work tended to focus on disciplinary discourses on creating norms for the body, often through increased definition and surveillance of the non-normative: the mad, the masturbating, and the medicalized. His later work focused more on macro-level technologies of governmentality, such as bio-power, which he defined in lectures delivered at the Collège de France in the 1970s, (published in 2007 as *Security, Territory, Population*), investigating how modern governments came to see the ‘basic biological features’ of its population as requiring government management: its food, its sexuality, its health and reproduction.¹ Although these mechanisms of control were concerns at the level of governance, regulatory mechanisms were replicated all through civil society: in schools, churches, and homes, and in literary and artistic representations. The fruitfulness of this model for the examination of Victorian

¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. by Michel Senellart, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

literature was demonstrated by several pioneering studies in the 1980s and 90s, such as D. A. Miller's 1988 *The Novel and the Police* and Mary Poovey's 1995 *Making a Social Body*.

As Foucault's ideas were translated and spread within the Anglo-American academic world in the 1980s, another major intellectual and social movement was underway: the theorisation of gender. Second wave feminist literary criticism and theory exploded into the academy in the 1970s, and in the 1980s, feminists took up the challenge of Foucault to point out the ways in which gender remained vexingly naturalised even in an academy that accepted the historicisation of sexuality and biopolitics. The Victorian period, as the period in which the first wave of feminism became very active and in which there grew an important public for women's writing, also became the subject of some of the most rapid developments in feminist literary scholarship in the 1970s and 80s. After an initial push in the seventies for the recuperation of women's voices by such critics as Elaine Showalter and Ellen Moers, attention to women as authors expanded beyond challenges to the canon to take up a variety of other concerns. Nancy Armstrong's 1987 *Desire and Domestic Fiction* showed that the modern individual was feminized and found its development most fully in the emergent revolutionary literary form of the period, the novel. French feminist theory as it was translated and popularised in the 1980s inspired more direct attention in the Anglo-American academy to women's embodied experience. The psychoanalytic approach to the body that that line of inquiry favoured has largely moved to the study of visual culture by the first decade of the current century, but the focus on the body was established by the late eighties and began to draw from other sources, notably Foucault.

By the 1990s, the work of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler offered sophisticated paradigms for understanding gender as behaviour ("doing") and its perpetuation, while Foucault continued to offer an attractive paradigm for understanding historically how such behaviours came into being and were reinforced through both formal and informal mechanisms. This period also saw the expansion of significant work on queer gendering and sexuality that began with works such as Jeffrey Weeks *Sex, Politics and Society* and Sedgwick's *Between Men*, both published in 1985. By the mid-1990s, several scholars took up the challenge of analysing the "unmarked term" in the gender dyad, and generated substantive work on normative Victorian masculinities: texts such as James Eli Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints* and Herbert Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities*, both published in 1995, exposed the ways masculinities were as, or perhaps more, anxiously constructed than the period's femininities. Today we also continue the project of reconstructing a more capacious and nuanced sense of the normative body within the multiple models of gendering and sexuality extant in the nineteenth century.

The six essays here continue in these rich traditions. They represent a diversity of approaches, from the representation of gender performance to the

concern with authorial influence and intertextuality, but all are interested in the construction of the body, its boundaries, its behaviours, and its interpellation into various paradigms of power and hierarchy. The essays are arranged in three pairs: we begin with a duo of essays on women and gendered behaviour, move on to a set on the anxious embodiment of men, and close with two essays that engage more formal and inter-textual concerns about bodily representation.

Our first two essays are both concerned with the realistic depiction (or lack thereof) of women's gendered and sexualised behaviours in literature, and how these behaviours are disciplined, in one case by defining normative forms of touching and affection between women of the middle class and, in the other, by drawing textual attention to women's sexual transgressions. Molly Livingstone, in "This little action": The Feminine Manner of Touching in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* explores the understanding of women's normative physical intimacy in the period. Victorians expected women to be physically affectionate, traits associated positively with femininity and maternity. Performing gender, then, meant performing affectionate touch between women but, as always, touch is hedged about with careful boundaries between appropriate and non-appropriate forms. Livingstone finds that appropriate touch between women was supposed to be spontaneous, affectionate and sincere and was scrutinised for adherence to this standard: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* offers an exemplary case of how touching behaviour can be read as revelatory of character.

On the other hand, what is not described by an author may be as, or more, important to understanding the stakes of bodily behaviours than what is apparent in the text. Livia Arndal Woods's 'Now You See It: Concealing and Revealing Pregnant Bodies in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Clever Woman of the Family*' shows how two such different novels are exemplary of the period's novelistic discourse generally in their sameness of the treatment of women's pregnancies. Pregnancy, if unproblematic, rarely surfaces in Victorian novels except in oblique references: babies often just appear, and the reader is expected to extrapolate the logical prologue. Novels that do refer to the pregnant body, Woods argues, tend to use those references in the service of the discipline of the transgressive woman, enlisting the reader in the process of inspecting the bodies and behaviours of the immodest or immoral female character and inscribing the reader herself in a normative discourse.

Victorian women were to be affectionate but modest: men were to be strong and self-contained. The second pair of essays takes up the ways that Victorian literature represented men's successes and failures in meeting proper gender norms. In 'The Farming Body in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*' Sanghee Lee takes up the juxtaposition of the agricultural and military male body in the period, and the ways in which increasing concerns about soldiers as representatives of the good Englishman are recuperated through the figure of the good farmer. Tracing mid-nineteenth century periodical's representations of the English farmer amid mid-

century legislative reform movements in the military and agricultural sectors of the economy, Lee shows that Victorians grew anxious about the military man's association with impulsivity and non-productivity. Lee argues that the farmer increasingly was juxtaposed as a more ideal and even heroic figure of the emerging national narrative: but a particular kind of farmer, one newly canny about economic issues. In Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Lee finds the figure of Gabriel Oak poised as the ideal heroic and productive English figure against the initially more appealing soldier-hero Troy, who is devalued as being focused more on display than productivity.

Leslie Allin's 'Leaky Bodies: Masculinity, Narrative, and Imperial Decay in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*' is concerned with the portrayal of the masculine body in Empire-Gothic. Allin shows that although we associate the leaky body with femininity in this period, in this most masculine of genres, the male body is in this novel shown to be dangerously permeable. Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, in Allin's reading, deliberately uses the leaky male body to expose the limits of imperial authority based on the inviolability of English masculinity. Through "profoundly unstable" justifications of imperial legitimacy and penetrable male bodies, the novel shows the limits of normativity and the weakness of white masculinity in the empire and at home.

Our final pair of essays take up intertextual concerns about the way writers appropriate the bodily metaphors, and sometimes the bodies themselves, of other writers. These interactions can be seen both in later writers' dialogue with earlier ones and in terms of form. James Whitehead argues in 'Biopower: Bodies, Minds, and Biographical Subjection in Victorian Lives of the Poets' that parallel to the discipline of bodies through bio-politics, the vitality and growth of the biographical form in this period shows an urge: to discipline the life, and body, of the unruly subject through diagnostic formulae. Biographies of poets positioned as pathological or immature geniuses offered ways both to celebrate their uniqueness and reinforce normative proprieties. Working backward from the portrayal of the obsessive biographer in Henry James' *The Aspern Papers* (1888), Whitehead demonstrates how early biographical portrayals of Shelley before the 1960s provide a kind of prologue to the psychoanalytic biography that came to be in vogue by the early twentieth century, tracing the ways in which Shelley's body and work (his corpus, in both senses) are pathologized and then accounted for within the framework of that pathology: allowing later Victorian writers to contain and explain the "irrationalities" of Romanticism at the same time.

Laura Fox Gill's 'Melting Bodies: The Dissolution of Bodily Boundaries in Milton and Swinburne' is also concerned with the ways a Victorian writer uses his predecessors: tracking the influence of Milton on Swinburne and identifying Swinburne's gleeful appropriations and transformations of the blind master. Counter to most scholars' assumptions that Swinburne's use of melting metaphors are

classically based, Gill argues that he is in direct dialogue with Milton's use of "melting" bodily boundaries in his portrayal of angelic and prelapsarian sexuality. In sourcing these metaphors, Swinburne thus escapes some of the disciplinary appurtenances of Victorian appropriations of classical sources, which tend to be anxious about the loss of boundaries. Gill contends that Swinburne invokes Miltonic joy at the dissolution of boundaries, invoking the image of devouring the lover not as brutal or destructive, but as divinely blissful, as in the monist universe of Milton's Paradise, boundaries are made not to be upheld, but dissolved.

The insights of these essays suggest that the work on the nineteenth-century body is far from done. We continue to elaborate our understanding of how gender was performed, and how competing models of gender allowed for critique and play as well as discipline and surveillance. Moreover, we see that literature was a key space for this play of possibilities: the literary was a space in which gender norms were not only chronicled and upheld, but exposed and challenged. The literary was a site of discipline, but also of transformation, allowing for a heteroglossia in which productive tension can be found between the hegemonic and the emergent.

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