

NOW YOU SEE IT: CONCEALING AND REVEALING PREGNANT BODIES IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* AND *THE CLEVER WOMAN OF THE FAMILY*

Livia Arndal Woods
(CUNY Graduate Center)

Abstract

This essay reads the concealment and revelation of pregnancy in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Mary Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) in order to demonstrate Victorian textual convention for the treatment of pregnancy. These readings establish the period tendency to conceal the pregnancies of modest/moral women and to reveal (as punishment, example, and narrative necessity) the pregnancies of immodest/immoral women. I also explore the ways in which a vocabulary of illness cooperates with the concealment and revelation of pregnant bodies. Reading illness and pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights* makes particularly legible our participation in the punishing narrative treatment of reproductive bodies that transgress normative behaviours: this heightened legibility prompts my unconventional pairing of Brontë with Yonge, a novelist invested in the novel as means of moral instruction and correction. This essay is about the gender, narration, (un)ethical modes of reading, and the specificities of bodies, about what pregnancy can tell us about these things and about what these things can tell us about pregnancy. The message in both directions is simple and important: when we see a character's pregnant body in a Victorian novel, chances are it is because she has done something wrong.

Reader, you likely inherit an understanding of what textual concealment might mean from decades of "suspicious readings" concerned as much with what Victorian novels repress as what they represent.¹ However, a sense of a text's ability to conceal pregnancy does not, I think, require training in literary criticism. Textual powers of concealment are particularly evident in the context of a marked, visible bodily phenomenon like pregnancy because most people at some point in their lives acquire concrete, specific knowledge of pregnant bodily presence: that, for example, pregnancy always precedes the birth of a child, that pregnancy tends to be visible,

¹ I refer here to Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' as applied in literary studies along the lines of what Steven Best and Sharon Marcus have called 'symptomatic readings'. Though the last ten years have seen valuable interventions in a "suspicious" tradition that reads against text for hidden meanings from scholars like Best, Marcus, and Rita Felski. This article employs both symptomatic reading practices in excavating representations of pregnant bodies and also the 'surface reading' or 'just reading' practices explored by Felski, Best, and Marcus as an effective way of reading, in this case, the highly visible surfaces of pregnant bodies. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Stephen Best & Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108 (2009), pp. 1–21; Rita Felski, 'Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion', *M/C Journal*, 15 (2011) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/431>> [accessed 26 November 2013].

that it tends to affect the way a person moves and is treated, that it can affect the way a person behaves and what a person chooses to do or not to do, that these effects of pregnancy tend to have an impact on basic, every-day activities and interactions. Call your general knowledge of pregnancy to mind when next reading a Victorian novel. Are any babies born in that novel? Yes? Does anything you know about pregnancy get represented? No? Something has been concealed from you.²

Much as our knowledge of the necessities of the body tells us that Victorian women must have eaten, regardless of whether or not they are commonly represented as having done so in novels, our knowledge of the phenomena of the body tells us that Victorian women must have been pregnant prior to producing babies, regardless of whether or not they are commonly represented as pregnant in novels. Certainly, babies appear quite often in Victorian novels of all generic stripes; that pregnancies appear so seldom signals the way in which all texts can perform the organising function often ascribed to literary realism of diverting attention away from what are deemed less ‘salient feature[s]’.³ That the pregnant female body – visible proof of sexuality – should not be a particularly salient feature for novelistic representation seems unsurprising in a cultural context that tended to idealise women’s lives as private, contained, and spiritual rather than public, expansive, or fleshy. However, because this article is concerned with Victorian novels in which pregnancy *is* treated, the question emerges: why does pregnancy sometimes become a salient novelistic feature? Or put another way, if we can understand practices of textual pregnancy concealment as a function of narrative organisation and cultural ideology, how can we understand practices of pregnancy revelation?

Though Victorian texts tend to conceal (reproductive) female bodies in general much as they conceal pregnancy in particular, both are often hinted at via the representations of illness. Our knowledge that illness has mapped over a pregnant body is usually available only after the conclusive proof of a new baby. In this sense, any woman who becomes a mother in a Victorian novel is “revealed”. However, if the revelation that the “illness, actions, and experiences of a character may have been shaped by her pregnancy is only possible in hindsight and does not prompt the further revelation of immorality, then she has been granted some modest textual cover. Similarly, if a pregnancy is mentioned or hinted at but the pregnant character

² For more on the general tendency of the Victorian novel to conceal the frequent and physically obvious pregnant body from narrative view, see Cynthia Northcutt Malone, ‘Near Confinement: Pregnant Women in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 29 (2000), pp. 367–385. See also, Clare Hanson, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy: Pregnancy, Medicine, and Culture, 1750-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³ Adam Greener, ‘Coincidence as Realist Technique: Improbable Encounters and the Representation of Selfishness in *Martin Chuzzlewit*’, *Narrative*, 20 (2012), pp. 322–342. See also Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London, Volume 1: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 1.

is not represented acting in space and time, she has also been granted a modest textual cover.⁴ The retraction of modest textual cover entails our ability as readers to suspect or know pregnancy in the narrative representation of female characters during that pregnancy (not only in hindsight). Modest textual cover is also retracted when there is narrative emphasis on the revelation of the pregnant body as a revelation of immodesty/immorality. When a pregnancy is referenced overtly in the context of failures of femininity and/or when a character's actions can be ascribed to pregnancy as they occur (and not only to illness), modest textual cover has been rescinded.

Victorian novels tend to rescind the modest cover over women's pregnant bodies in cases of immodesty or immorality.⁵ The logic of pregnancy revelation in the Victorian novel follows familiar schoolroom laws of power relations and behavioural regulation: when someone breaks the rules in a rigid system, someone gets made an example of. When it is possible to read pregnancy in the mental and physical experience/representation of a character, that character is generally being punished.

The tendency of Victorian novels to conceal the pregnancies of modest women and reveal the pregnancies and (reproductive) bodies of immodest women is marked in both Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Mary Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865). In these novels, pregnancy is concealed in the narrative treatment of modest/moral characters and revealed when characters commit

⁴ For two generically diverse examples of this tendency to by mention the "condition" of pregnant characters while shielding them from direct narration in space and time, we might look to Wilkie Collins's 1868 *The Moonstone* and George Eliot's 1874 *Middlemarch*. In the former, Gabriel Betteridge conducts his habitual reading of *Robinson Crusoe* upon the marriage of Rachel Verinder to Franklin Blake. Betteridge marks a passage referring to the having of children to return to when 'the marriage of Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel is some months older.' In due time, Mr. Franklin visits Betteridge with the news that 'something is going to happen in the house,' something that 'concerns the family' and 'has a great deal to do with [his good lady].' That good lady herself never appears during this scene, or, indeed, again in the novel. In *Middlemarch*, the pregnancy of the modest Celia Chettam is hinted at only gently in the reference her husband makes to her curtailed travel by carriage. Celia herself never appears in the narrative during her pregnancy. In contrast, the immodest Rosamond Lydgate is described socialising, flirting, and even engaging in the horseback riding to which her husband ascribes her eventual miscarriage. Pregnant Celia does not figure as a narrative actor in space and time but pregnant Rosamond does.

⁵ We can think, here, of Oliver's mother's illegitimate pregnancy in *Oliver Twist* (1838) contrasted with, for example, the euphemistic 'ship' of Bella Wilfer/Rokesmith/Harmon's conventional, married pregnancy in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), of flirtatious Rosamond's miscarriage in *Middlemarch* (1874) and Hetty's illegitimate pregnancy in *Adam Bede* (1859), and of the revelation of Ruth Hilton's illegitimate pregnancy in *Ruth* (1853). Though this dynamic shifts somewhat during the last decade of the century as sexual bodies gained greater cultural visibility in general, the tendency remains marked as late as the early-mid-twentieth century and is recognizable in such *fin-de-siècle* texts as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893), to name a few.

repeated transgressions of feminine standards of behaviour. Cathy's extra-marital flirtation with the ambiguously classed (and racialised) Heathcliff undermines the convention of silence about middle-and-upper-class reproductive bodies as does Bessie's unfeminine willingness to play at 'croquet' with indiscriminate men. The revelation of pregnancy in both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Clever Woman of the Family* is most legible in contrast with the concealed pregnancies of more modest characters in each novel. Exploring concealments and revelations of pregnancy focuses the reader's (un)ethical gaze on women's bodies in potentially punishing ways.⁶

Pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights*

There are three pregnancies in *Wuthering Heights*: Frances Earnshaw's, Cathy Linton's (née Earnshaw) and Isabella Heathcliff's (née Linton). I read two of those pregnancies closely.⁷ Cathy's pregnancy – as well as her immodesty, immorality, and illness – is revealed to the reader before she gives birth; Frances' pregnancy – though not her illness or potential immorality – is concealed from the reader until after the birth of her child.

Wuthering Heights hinges on concealment. Both thematically and structurally, the text withholds and veils information and narration. Heathcliff's origins are concealed, leading to wild critical conjecture about his parentage and race; characters conceal themselves (Isabella from Heathcliff after she escapes their disastrous marriage) and are concealed (the *Wuthering Heights* family from Catherine Linton, for example) in both generations.⁸ Structurally, the novel builds in and around levels

⁶ Victorian literary criticism of the last 25 years has frequently explored visibility, visibility, and perspective and theorists of varying stripes have established a concept of the gaze firmly enough in our critical discourse that it now verges on the passé – a theoretical framework so accepted as to seem obvious. However, I employ a concept of the gaze – inflected, certainly by Michel Foucault's medical gaze, the male gaze in the feminist tradition of Laura Mulvey for example, and the "appropriating" colonial gaze of Mary Louise Pratt – particular to the reading of embodied phenomenon that resist being read. This is a gaze that notices and understands the possibly pregnant significance of a loose dress, a hand on the "side", a change in complexion or expression. This is a readerly gaze that apprehends pregnant bodies in the Victorian novel, often with uneasy ethical implications. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 833–844; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁷ I conduct a reading of Isabella's pregnancy in the Chapter 1 of my dissertation 'Heavy Expectations: Representations of Pregnancy in the Victorian Novel'.

⁸ For more on Heathcliff's racialization, see Elsie B. Michie, *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993);

of limitation and ambiguity. *Wuthering Heights* has a ‘Chinese Box’ structure: one narrative encloses another narrative that encloses another, like a Matryoshka doll pregnant with variations upon herself.⁹ As long as Frances and Cathy maintain even a cursory investment in normative feminine behaviour, the novel encloses their pregnant bodies in conventional textual cover.

Frances’s pregnancy is just barely legible under the bright glare of hindsight. After the birth of her son, Hareton, it is possible to read pregnancy back into the language of illness that marks what we now suspect to have been the first trimester of her pregnancy, a time often marked by exhaustion, nausea, and emotional intensity. A little chronological guesswork supports my contention that Frances may well be pregnant in the sections of the novel I examine. Charles Percy Sanger’s meticulous timeline of the events of *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates that Mr. Earnshaw dies and Hindley Earnshaw arrives with Frances in unspecified months of 1777.¹⁰ Nelly Dean’s narration does not make clear how much time elapses between their arrival and Catherine and Heathcliff’s fateful trip to Thrushcross Grange, which Sanger places in the third week of November, 1777; however, the elapsed time is passed over in about a page and a half of text. It seems unlikely to me that Hindley and Frances arrive much more than a few months before their sister (-in-law)’s accident at the Grange. Sanger places Hareton Earnshaw’s birth in early June of 1778. Unlike Catherine Linton’s birth, no mention is made of Hareton arriving early. Therefore, it is most probable that Frances conceived in mid-late September of 1777. If, as seems likely, no more than a few months elapse between her arrival at *Wuthering Heights* and Cathy’s injury at Thrushcross Grange, then Frances is already pregnant when she first appears in the novel, is pregnant when Nelly thinks her ‘half-silly, from her behaviour’ during her father-in-law’s funeral.¹¹

Nelly, unable and/or unwilling to see and/or narrate Frances’s pregnancy, does narrate the signs of physical illness and emotional struggle Frances experiences during the funeral:

Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women’s Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Carine M Mardorossian, *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

⁹ J. Hillis Miller, *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 96.

¹⁰ Charles Percy Sanger, ‘The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism*, ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 286–298.

¹¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism* [1847], ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 45. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[Frances] ran into her chamber, and made me come with her [...] she sat shivering and clasping her hands, and asking repeatedly –

“Are they gone yet?”

Then she began describing with hysterical emotion the effect it produced on her to see black; and started and trembled, and, at last, fell a weeping – and when I asked what was the matter? answered, she didn’t know; but she felt so afraid of dying.

I imagined her as little likely to die as myself. She was rather thin, but young, and fresh complexioned, and her eyes sparkled as bright as diamonds. I did remark, to be sure, that mounting the stairs made her breathe quick, that the least sudden noise set her all in a quiver, and that she coughed troublesomely sometimes: but, I knew nothing of what these symptoms portended. (p. 45)

Certainly, ‘what these symptoms portend’ is Frances’ consumptive illness. Her manic behaviour, sparkling eyes, difficulty breathing, and cough all gesture toward an ‘easily recognisable “code” for consumption’ in Victorian fiction.¹² Indeed, interpreted only as evidence of Frances’ consumption, the scene above demonstrates the ways in which a reader’s knowledge about the body shapes textual significance even, perhaps mostly, when that knowledge is not referred to directly. Our early readerly awareness of Frances’ consumption – achieved, in part, through Nelly’s narration of her own lack of awareness: she ‘knew nothing of what these symptoms portended’ – is an awareness based in applying our practical knowledge about bodies to a textual representation. Though there is little room for our knowledge about pregnancy to shape a first reading of Frances’ symptoms during her father-in-law’s funeral, returning to the scene with knowledge of both her illness *and* pregnancy demonstrates the ways in which the representation of women’s illness and struggle can both evoke and conceal pregnancy. That we can so easily read Nelly’s meaning about ‘what these symptoms portend’ to refer to Frances’ consumption rather than to Frances’ pregnancy – about which Nelly would also have learned in the months that followed her original failure to read the significance of Frances’ symptoms – demonstrates the ways in which the overt representation of female illness can help to shield a covert pregnancy.¹³

Much as Frances demonstrates familiar symptoms of tuberculosis, so, too, does she demonstrate familiar symptoms of pregnancy. Frances’ “hysterical” state is suggestive of both our contemporary stereotype of the irrationally emotional pregnant

¹² Clark Lawlor, ‘Katherine Byrne, Tuberculosis and Victorian Literary Imagination’ (review), in *The British Society for Literature and Science* <<http://www.bsfs.ac.uk/reviews/romantic-and-victorian/katherine-byrne-tuberculosis-and-the-victorian-literary-imagination/>> [accessed 12 April 2015].

¹³ For more on the figuring of tuberculosis as sexed and sexual, see Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

woman and also Victorian stereotypes of behaviour associated with the ‘puerperal madness’¹⁴ that could accompany pregnancy, childbirth, or the post-partum period. That this behaviour seems to cohere around anxiety over the threat and proximity of death speaks to Victorian concerns about death in childbirth.¹⁵ In imagining that Frances is ‘as unlikely to die’ as herself, Nelly is failing to see and/or failing to acknowledge having seen Frances’ deadly consumption, certainly, but also Frances’ pregnancy – even if Frances were not consumptive, she would be more likely to die than Nelly because she is pregnant in a time other than the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries.¹⁶

If illness cooperates with the text’s concealment of pregnancy in the passage above, it is narrative structure that most effectively conceals Frances’ pregnancy from the reader. Much as Frances’ pulls Nelly into a private room away from view during Mr. Earnshaw’s funeral, Nelly’s narrative pulls Frances away from view during the months when she is visibly pregnant. Nelly’s narrative skips over the second and third trimesters of Frances’ pregnancy and picks up again just after Hareton’s birth.

In reading Frances’ pregnant body critically, we approach her punitively, questioning her modesty and even morality. As Frances’ concerned repetition of the question ‘Are they gone yet?’ signals, being seen can be dangerous for a woman’s reputation and Frances’ reputation in the Gimmerton community – where she is a new arrival – is foetal: unformed and vulnerable to negative impressions. Indeed, reading the chronological likelihood that she is already pregnant when she arrives at Wuthering Heights (and in *Wuthering Heights*), sheds light, also, on the speculation about her marriage to Hindley Earnshaw implicit in Nelly’s narrative of the events surrounding Frances’ arrival:

¹⁴ See Hilary Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁵ If Frances’ heightened awareness of death can, perhaps, be understood as proto-Victorian, her fearful reaction does not model an ideal religious, self-effacing, and practical Victorian approach to death. See Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Both contemporary and Victorian maternal mortality statistics vary significantly across geographical, class, and racial divides but it is generally the case that Anglo-American rates of maternal mortality in pregnancy and childbirth dropped significantly in the twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth century, despite (and/or sometimes because of) increasing medical involvement and intervention in pregnancy and childbirth, pregnancy brought the possibility of death very near. Indeed, rates of maternal mortality in nineteenth-century hospitals were often as high as 1 per 100 births. For these statistics see Ignaz Semmelweis, *Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever (1861)*, trans. by K. Codell Carter (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). Whether the cause is tuberculosis, pregnancy, or the potent combination of the two, Frances is certainly more likely to die than Nelly and her fears of death could easily be a response of the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth as well as to the risks of tuberculosis.

Mr. Hindley came home to the funeral; and – a thing that amazed us, and set the neighbours gossiping right and left – he brought a wife with him. What she was, and where she was born he never informed us; probably, and she had neither money nor name to recommend her, or he would scarcely have kept the union from his father. (p. 45)

One possibility is that Frances Earnshaw was unknown to Mr. Earnshaw while he lived because she was neither well-born nor wealthy – ‘had neither money nor name.’ However, another possibility is that Frances was unknown to Mr. Earnshaw during his life because Hindley and she were only married very shortly before his death. To have married quickly and in secret suggests the possibility of necessity, the possibility, in short, that Frances may have already been pregnant. The mention of neighbourhood gossip surrounding her arrival gestures toward this possibility of impropriety. Nelly does not choose to elaborate upon the implications of the neighbours’ gossip, but in reading Frances’ pregnancy closely, we join their less restrained ranks.

Though it is likely that most readers hardly know Frances well enough to be gratified by her “punishment”, some readers may share Nelly’s satisfaction in Cathy Linton’s pregnant comeuppance. Cathy, passionate and charming, is also wilful, selfish, and capable of both passive and active cruelty. Her most redeeming characteristic is her love for Heathcliff, but Heathcliff himself, even in her telling, is a ‘fierce, pitiless, wolfish man’ (p. 45). In the bonds of affinity that govern love in *Wuthering Heights*, this marks Cathy, too, as fierce, pitiless, and wolfish: ‘whatever our souls are made of,’ she famously declares ‘his and mine are the same’ (p. 82). Nelly frames Cathy’s physical and mental suffering during her pregnancy as punishment, as no more than what ‘she deserved, for bringing [her illness] all on herself’ and she includes the reader in this punishment by making Cathy’s pregnant body legible to us during the fact (p. 124). Unlike her reticence in Frances’ case, Nelly does not cut away from the period during which Cathy’s pregnancy would be visible to those around her.

A word on chronology, helped again by Sanger: Catherine Linton is born, premature, at ‘2am on Monday, 20th March, 1784’, 11 months after Cathy and Edgar’s marriage, about seven months after Heathcliff’s return and about three months after Cathy locks herself up in her bedroom, inducing illness and insanity.¹⁷ It is not until two months after the onset of her illness, early in her third trimester, that Cathy’s pregnancy is revealed to the reader. However, it would very likely have been visible for some time at least to Edgar, the doctor treating her during her illness, and Nelly, who serves as our eyes and ears. It would almost certainly have been known to Cathy herself. Our own knowledge about pregnant bodies tells us that they often

¹⁷ Sanger, p. 292.

become visible during the second trimester. Yet it is not until about a month before she gives birth and dies that the novel reveals that ‘on [Cathy’s] existence depended that of another’ (p. 133). Though Nelly does not directly reveal Cathy’s pregnancy until its third trimester, she does emphasize Cathy’s immodesty and immorality during her first trimester and narrates her illness during her second trimester in ways that are also suggestive of pregnancy. In reading the course of Cathy’s pregnancy, I read the elements – first: immodesty/immorality, second: illness/struggle, and lastly: revelation – that mark, in the first and second cases, Victorian textual conventions for the covert suggestion of pregnancy, and, in the third case, its overt representation.

Although Cathy’s transgressions of modesty in her first trimester do not seem to amount to actual infidelity, they are certainly tinged with the possibility of (sexual) immorality.¹⁸ When Heathcliff returns to Yorkshire to find Cathy newly married to Edgar, the reunion and subsequent relationship between the friends/siblings/lovers is figured in terms of immodest visibility, transgressive excess, and physicality. The threat of sexual immorality with Heathcliff is heightened by chronological details: Cathy’s baby, ‘a seven month-child,’ is born seven months after the return of Heathcliff (p. 137). Though I am not arguing that Catherine Linton is Heathcliff’s daughter, this timing is suggestive in a novel as tightly organized as *Wuthering Heights*. The narrative that relates the period of Cathy’s first trimester is marked by her immodesty and potential immorality with a racially and socially ambiguous man who is not her husband. Cathy’s indelicate announcement to Heathcliff that ‘half a dozen nephews shall erase [Isabella’s] title [as Edgar’s heir], please Heaven’ brings a hypothetical pregnancy into circulation during the early months of her actual pregnancy.¹⁹ This pregnant spectre of an erotic relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff haunts the novel, striking most readers as a more visceral presence than Edgar’s wan body and it is that eroticism which triggers Cathy’s illness and death directly and her pregnancy, indirectly.

Much as the possibility of her sexual immorality with Heathcliff seems to spur – chronologically if not biologically – Cathy’s pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights*, so too does that possibility initiate her descent into illness. To punish Edgar and Heathcliff for clashing, Cathy – about four months pregnant – immures herself in her

¹⁸ It is interesting that – in the way a woman’s illness and struggle can be suggestive of pregnancy – the class difference Edgar emphasizes between Cathy and Heathcliff is suggestive of sexual immorality. Though the scope of this paper does not allow for a thorough exploration of social class and the revelation of pregnant bodies in text, it is the case that class often plays an important role in the vulnerability of pregnancy to revelation, as in *Ruth* and *Adam Bede*, for instance.

¹⁹ Brontë, p. 307. Though my reading here approaches this quote as evidence of Cathy’s immodesty and potential immorality, Mary Visick cites this same passage as evidence of the chastity of Cathy’s relationship with Heathcliff. See ‘The Genesis of *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism*, ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 299–321.

room for three days. She lives ‘on nothing but cold water and ill-temper,’ eventually working herself into a consumptive illness and madness (p. 123). Although Cathy has been pregnant for months leading up to this self-imprisonment, when we have seen her body, it has been primarily as a site of immodesty and immorality, certainly not the overt site of pregnancy. Similarly, although she is pregnant – likely visibly so – during this crisis of health and sanity, we see Cathy’s body in these scenes primarily as ill. Though we cannot read Cathy’s pregnancy directly in these scenes, we can read her illness in ways that trace over the territory of her reproductive body. Cathy’s consumptive, hysterical illness – like Frances’ – is tangled up with pregnancy.

Much as Nelly ‘knew nothing of what [Frances’] symptoms portended,’ so does she assert that she would ‘not have spoken so if [she] had known [Cathy’s] true condition’ (p. 104). The implication in Cathy’s case as in Frances’ is that these ‘symptoms portend’ the illness that is both women’s ‘true condition.’ While Frances’ pregnancy is likely only in its very early stages when Nelly fails to read her body, Cathy’s condition is at least four months along, and this reference seems to gesture more directly to pregnancy. “Condition” is a euphemistic mainstay for pregnancy, particularly in the nineteenth-century novel, much as the “confinement” of Cathy to her room employs the conventional vocabulary for late-term pregnancy, childbirth, and the post-partum period (p. 114). These terms are employed something like Nelly’s impulse to ‘reach something to wrap about’ Cathy, employed, that is to say, as textual protection (p. 108).

Like Frances, Cathy has a heightened response to another kind of ‘protection’ from view: death. Though even death doesn’t end up shielding Cathy’s body from (sexual) violation – it is her ghost’s arm that Lockwood rubs against a broken window pan until ‘the blood ran down and soaked the bed clothes’ and her rotting body that Heathcliff embraces – she fixates on death’s proximity during her illness (p. 30). Unlike Frances, who seeks to avoid thoughts of death, Cathy welcomes them, considering suicide, the afterlife, and her own grave at length. However, Cathy’s tenuous hold on life ends up having less to do with her illness – from which she largely recovers prior to dying – than with the pregnancy that becomes, literally, the death of her: Cathy dies two hours after giving birth.²⁰ Of course, that Cathy should become fascinated with death during her pregnancy at a time when many, many women died from complications in childbirth, is as logical as that she would become fascinated with death during illness. Here, again, pregnancy and illness function alongside one another.

²⁰ Historian Carolyn Day has done work on the ways in which pregnancy is often framed in Victorian popular and medical discourse as a temporary “cure” for consumption that works only as long as women continued to be pregnant. See ‘Pregnancy as Prophylactic: Discourses on Consumption and the Female Body’, in *Evidence* (presented at the North American Victorian Studies Association, Pasadena, CA, 2013).

Cathy's immodest behaviour cuts away at the layers of protection Victorian texts tend to erect between readers and women's bodies. During her illness, we see Cathy's very blood moving ('why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words?' she asks [p. 124]) and her whole body in troubled motion. We are also offered an image of the cutting away of protections in 'the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife' (p. 108). This 'knife' works something like our own sharp focus on Cathy's immodest body. Though we likely harbour more sympathy for Cathy than does Nelly, it is difficult for the reader to avoid at least considering whether Cathy has not brought her suffering upon herself with her 'wicked waywardness' (p. 109). Our ability, alongside Nelly, to see Cathy half-undressed and disordered in her bedroom is a kind of punishment that gives rise to her 'glow of shame' at being observed in insanity (p. 106).

Sorting through the contents of her ripped pillow, Cathy echoes Ophelia, hinting at that spectre of her passionate, sexual immorality with Heathcliff and encoding anxieties about pregnancy and maternity:²¹

"That's a turkey's," she murmured to herself; "and this is a wild duck's; and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows [...] And here is a moor-cock's; and this – I should know it among a thousand – it's a lapwing's. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot: we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dared not come [...] Are they red, any of them? Let me look." (p. 105)

In this scene, Cathy both nests – in the sense that she gathers up her feathers and contemplates a literal nest – and fails to nest – in the colloquial sense of "nesting" used to refer to a biological desire to order one's home in preparation for the arrival of a new infant. That Nelly calls Cathy's feather collecting 'baby work' deepens both the sense of this being a pregnant activity – work in preparation for a baby – and also a failure to prepare properly for a child (p. 105). Indeed, it is a failure to care properly for babies that is at the heart of Cathy's feather scene; Cathy remembers the murder by forced neglect of the baby birds in the nest. Anxious about the possibility of further murder, Cathy checks the feathers of her pillow for the tell-tale 'red' of blood. Cathy has just starved herself – and, by extension, the second-trimester foetus she

²¹ For a more extended reading of similarities between this scene and Ophelia's mad scenes, see Katherine F. Fitzpatrick, 'A Document in Madness: Representations of Ophelia as Lovesick Madwoman in the Mid-Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (unpublished B.A., Mount Holyoke College, 2011).

carries – for three days; she now recalls an instance of baby birds being starved to death and checks her bedding for blood; the blood of a shot bird suggestive, here, of the blood of a miscarriage. Cathy's feather-scene speaks to fears about pregnancy though the pregnancy – unlike the pillow-stuffing – remains concealed under the cover of Cathy's illness.

It is only when Cathy begins to recover physically (though not mentally) that her pregnancy is revealed. As Edgar 'sit[s] beside her, tracing the gradual return of bodily health' (p. 114) – tracing, in other words, the changes in Cathy's body – the reader hears Nelly's announcement that 'there was double cause to desire [Cathy's recovery], for on her existence depended that of another [...] in a little while Mr. Linton's heart would be gladdened [...] by the birth of an heir' (p. 115). The direct revelation of Cathy's pregnancy allows the reader, too, to trace Cathy's bodily condition, to read the pregnancy beneath her 'loose, white dress' and 'recovered flesh' (pp. 130-131). Our punishing ability to read that private body coincides with the beginning both of the highly visible third-trimester, and of our heightened ability to read sexual immorality into the immodest relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff.

As before the revelation of her pregnancy, Cathy is painted in terms of vivid corporality. In her final meeting with Heathcliff, they share an undeniably sexual embrace 'for some five minutes, during which period he bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before [...] but then my mistress had kissed him first' (p.132). Nelly's only remark about this, clearly adulterous, death-bed make-out session is to blame Cathy for the beginning of it. Nelly is, by now, unsurprised to see the failings of Cathy's moral character played out via her mortal body. As narrator, she not only offers Cathy's body up to our gaze, but directs our attention to both its visibility and our role as its spectator:

The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture [...] Her present countenance had a wild vindictiveness [...] and so inadequate was his stock of gentleness to the requirements of her condition, that on his letting go I saw four distinct impressions left blue in the colourless skin. (p. 133)

Our punishing gaze falls again on Cathy's "wild" body. Unlike earlier scenes, however, in this scene Cathy's acting and acted upon body is known to be pregnant. The 'condition' for which Heathcliff possesses an 'inadequate [...] stock of gentleness' points directly toward both Cathy's illness and her late-term pregnancy. She is both violent (ripping Heathcliff's hair from his head) and the recipient of violence. Her body, damaged by the bruises of Heathcliff's passion, will soon be irredeemably 'impress[ed]' by the violence of childbirth.

When Nelly observes ‘the violent, unequal throbbing of her heart, which beat visibly and audibly under this excess of agitation,’ she observes Cathy’s violently pregnant body overflowing its own bounds (p. 133). It is possible, though unlikely, that Nelly would see Cathy’s heart beating under the layered covers of her clothing, her skin, and ribcage. It is, however, almost impossible that Nelly, an observer of, rather than participant in, the passionate meeting between Cathy and Heathcliff would be able to hear Cathy’s heart beating. Not only do we see and hear Cathy’s pregnant body acting in space and time here, but we see and hear it with a surreal, heightened vibrancy. This heightened rather than limited awareness of Cathy’s pregnant body acting and experiencing proves a clear contrast to the narrative avoidance of the mid/late-term pregnant body of Frances.

An impulse to shield modest women from view and pillory immodest women – to erect an angel in the house and legalise the invasion of working class women’s bodies in the streets, for example – gives shape to narrative conventions for the treatment of pregnancy. A tendency to conceal the pregnant bodies of feminine women like Frances, and to reveal the pregnant bodies of transgressive women like Cathy, often maps onto vocabularies of illness. As a result, our necessarily symptomatic readings of the highly visible surface of pregnant bodies in novels like *Wuthering Heights* establishes a punitive mode of engagement with pregnancy, an invitation to look at women’s bodies in ways that can feel ethically problematic to our contemporary critical gaze: informed by deep reservations about Victorian constructions of gender. Twenty-first century readers are even more likely to squirm at their narrative involvement in the punishing narrations of gender in general, and pregnancy in particular, in the morally didactic novels of Charlotte Mary Yonge. A troubling alignment of readerly perspective and a patriarchal gaze on the (pregnant) bodies of immodest women exerts particular weight in the narration of Rachel Curtis and Bessie Keith in Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*.

Cruel and Usual Punishment: *The Clever Woman of the Family*

In *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Rachel Curtis is a compelling twenty-first century heroine: slightly abrasive and rough around the edges, but passionately invested in forgoing the obligations of married life in order to improve living conditions for the working poor. Rachel’s “clever” attempts, however, to enforce her will on her young male cousins as a tutor, founding of S.P.E.W. (Society for the Professional Education of Women), and subversion of masculine medical authority, are treated as deeply dangerous. By placing herself, without familial masculine cover, in public view, Rachel sacrifices her feminine privacy and is obliged to testify in court, to acknowledge the failures of her over-reaching, and to submit to a marriage with the cool, controlling Alick Keith, who directs her energies with military efficiency. As Mia Chen has observed, this marriage ‘transforms [Rachel] from

unmarriageable bluestocking to [...] wife,' a transformation that re-encloses her in the protective cover of textual modesty.²² When the novel's "happy" ending further transforms Rachel into a mother, it does so at a decided narrative remove from her pregnant body.

If readers of pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights* may come to feel complicit in the textual punishment of Cathy for her transgression of feminine modesty, readers of pregnancy in *The Clever Woman of the Family* are more likely to feel instructed. The novel's conservative third-person narrator teaches readers and characters alike what are the wages of women's sin, *very* broadly interpreted.²³ Focused primarily on humbling Rachel, the novel achieves her punishment, in part, through the examples of less redeemable women – most notably her charming, flirtatious, mercenary sister-in-law, Bessie Keith. The dramatic revelation of Bessie's pregnancy via her death in childbirth is the direct result of her immodesty and leads to the exposure of her immorality. In context, Bessie's death reads as punishment for her failure to be a modest body and a subservient wife, sister, and niece. As is the case in *Wuthering Heights*, the revelation of Bessie's pregnancy maps onto the narrative representation of her immodesty, her potential immorality, and a vocabulary of illness. Rather than shielding or avoiding Bessie's body during what is starkly revealed to have been the third-trimester of her pregnancy, the novel emphasizes that body's visibility. The significance of that emphasis and of the revelation of her pregnancy is particularly apparent in contrast with the concealment of other pregnant bodies in the novel and instructive, finally, of the powers of masculine observation.

In her introduction to the Broadview edition of the novel, Clare A. Simmons mentions Georgina Battiscombe's frequently cited "joke" that, in *Clever Woman*, 'Bessie Keith falls over a croquet hoop [...] and immediately produces a baby' prompting the conclusion that Yonge 'resembled that legendary aboriginal tribe beloved of anthropologists in her ignorance of the connection between birth and sex'.²⁴ Though Simmons treats this representation of Yonge's reproductive

²² "'And There Was No Helping It': Disability and Social Reproduction in Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*", *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 4 (2008), para. 19. <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue42/chen.htm> [accessed 20 March 2015].

²³ Though my readings of Yonge differ in many regards from those of Gavin Budge, I find his discussion of the 'strong mode' of reading Yonge elicits compelling: 'A formal consequence of this critical perspective to which I draw attention is the way in which Yonge's fiction solicits an active, or "strong" mode of reading to a far greater degree than most Victorian novels. Explicit narratorial comment, of the kind exemplified by the moralizing authorial interventions of *East Lynne* [or George Eliot!], is almost entirely absent from Yonge's writing'. Gavin Budge, *Charlotte M. Yonge: Religion, Feminism and Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 12.

²⁴ 'Introduction', in *The Clever Woman of the Family* [1865] by Charlotte M. Yonge (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 12. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

ignorance anecdotally, as a useful starting point for an exploration of ‘The Woman Question’ in *Clever Woman*, my reading of Bessie’s pregnancy demonstrates the ways in which the novel does, in fact, gesture toward – in a chronologically accurate way, no less – Bessie’s immodest body and her pregnancy prior to her accident. Reading Bessie’s pregnancy shifts the conversation from dealing with authorial ignorance to dealing, instead, with the narrative (in this case, didactic) uses of established textual conventions for both the concealment and revelation of pregnant bodies. The revelation of Bessie’s pregnancy draws attention to, rather than away from, her immodest body. The seemingly out-of-the-blue declaration that ‘her baby is born’ follows many implicit representations of Bessie’s knowing immodesty and precedes the full exposure of her immoral flirtations and debts. The revelation of Bessie’s pregnancy instigates revelations about the extent of her transgressions of appropriate feminine behaviour.

Yonge’s didactic tone is most often filtered through her descriptions of her characters’ thoughts, conversations, or situations and *Clever Woman* lays a foundation for the revelation of Bessie’s immodesty, immorality, and pregnancy in representing – seemingly sans judgment – her charming but immodest behaviour and her heightened physicality. Bessie first appears in the novel in a semi-public scene of ‘saucy [...] cross fire’ with her brother. That this private familial banter ought not to be open to more general view is indicated by Rachel’s discomfort at witnessing it. Rather than attempt to shield herself from accusations of transgression, however, Bessie draws attention to her own flirtations with immodesty; ‘I have not transgressed, have I?’ Bessie asks in the midst of her ‘reckless talk’ when, of course, she has.²⁵ Similarly, in speaking casually of her brother to ‘Fanny as to an old friend,’ though she has known her for no more than an hour or two, Bessie highlights, rather than conceals, her own impropriety: ‘I am afraid I was very naughty,’ she half-heartedly apologises (p. 197). In calling attention to her misbehaviour, Bessie excuses her immodesty immodestly, building a sort of house of mirrors in which her hyper-visibility makes it difficult to discern her actual transgressions. Similarly, in her eager pursuit of sport, Bessie announces her physical body rather than containing it. Bessie’s ‘one great pleasure [with Rachel is] bathing’ and she experiences ‘ecstasies at the naiad performances they share together on the smooth bit of sandy shore, where they dabble and float fearlessly’ (pp. 203-204). Though we are assured that Bessie’s pagan ecstasy at physical freedom takes place in ‘absolute privacy,’ we are, nonetheless, treated to textual displays of Bessie’s enthusiastic body.

Bessie’s most public displays of enthusiastic embodiment take the form of playing at croquet. One of the strangest aspects of *The Clever Woman of the Family*

²⁵ Charlotte M. Yonge, *The Clever Woman of the Family*, ed. by Clare A. Simmons (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 195, 196. Further references given after quotations in the text.

for the twenty-first century reader is likely the un-ironic vilification of this seemingly tame lawn-sport. Reading the novel, the croquet mallet and hoop come to seem like crudely obvious sexual symbols. The croquet field is the site of a promiscuous mixing of the sexes, avoidance of feminine duty, and the very real dangers that women's embodiment poses to their modesty, morality, and future wellbeing. It is Bessie who ushers croquet and all its evils onto the scene, inspired by her enjoyment of the sport during a summer spent at the (aptly-named) Littleworthy.

Bessie's sporting enjoyment of her body twice leads other women directly into immodesty. In the first case, one of her 'ecstatic' bathing adventures with Rachel leads to their encounter with Mr. Mauleverer, the ambiguously-classed villain who enables Rachel's deadly attempts at charity. In the second case, the immodest mingling of the sexes (and classes) that occurs after Bessie exposed the Avonmouth community to 'croquet fever' tarnishes even the novel's resident angel in the house, Lady Fanny Temple (p. 258).

What proves most conclusively that Bessie ought to be ashamed of the immodesties of the croquet-ground, is that croquet literally causes the textual exposure of her pregnancy. Bessie's own characterisation of 'the great charm of the sport [being] that one could not play it above eight months in the year' invites an illicit comparison between croquet and Bessie's (sexually) reproductive body. Bessie's pregnancy, likewise croquet, does not play above eight months (p. 255). Like Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*, Bessie gives birth prematurely. Bessie's pregnancy is heavily-hinted in the 'minutely personal confidences about her habits, hopes, and fears' that she confides to the newly-married Rachel seven months after her own marriage; within a month of offering those 'personal confidences' Bessie's likely worst fears have come to pass: after tripping over a croquet hoop, her child makes a 'sudden rush into the world'. Though the child survives, Bessie does not (p. 467). That both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Clever Woman of the Family* equate revealed pregnancy with premature birth seems interesting to me on two counts: firstly, that both Cathy and Bessie give birth prematurely is connected to the fact that both Cathy and Bessie give birth in the context of disordering illness and injury, a context that we have seen clearly maps easily onto and over pregnant bodies; secondly, "premature" babies are a familiar accompaniment to what we now call, colloquially, the "shotgun wedding": a wedding meant to cover up a pre-marital pregnancy. In such cases, the resulting birth of child is misrepresented as "early" for propriety's sake. I am not arguing that either Cathy or Bessie becomes pregnant prior to marriage, but I am suggesting that premature labour associatively freighted with suggestions of illness and immodesty tend to mark representations of pregnancy more generally in the Victorian novel.

Bessie's marriage, however, need hardly conceal a pre-marital pregnancy in order to suggest immodesty. Her mercenary choice of husband suggests plenty. Bessie – now Lady Keith – does not appear during the first seven months of her

marriage but makes a ‘sudden rush’ back in the world of the novel in its eight month. That this is also the eighth month of her pregnancy is almost certain – prior to the twentieth century, the chances of an infant born more than ten weeks premature surviving were slim.²⁶

Bessie returns to narrative visibility during her third trimester, the trimester in which a pregnancy is most visible. Indeed, it is Bessie’s heightened bodily visibility which strikes Rachel when she finds ‘herself close behind a gauzy white cloak over a lilac silk, that filled the whole breadth of the central aisle, and by the dark curl descending beneath the tiny white bonnet, as well as by the turn of the graceful head, she knew her sister-in-law’ (p. 447). Though Bessie’s cloak ostensibly shields her body from view, it is gauzy and white, thin stuff which adds to Rachel’s impression of her (pregnant) size, filling the ‘whole breadth’ of the church-aisle. Indeed, Bessie is a body, here, before she is a person: Rachel knows her by her movements (the turn of her head) and by the movements of her body (the curl descending beneath her bonnet).

Rather than seeking to limit the visibility of her body at a time when it communicates particularly vociferously, Bessie pursues social engagements ‘in town and country’ that seem, to Rachel, ‘inconsistent with the prudence she spoke of with regard to her own health,’ ‘health,’ here again, a term that slips between illness and pregnancy (p. 449). That Bessie’s gadding amounts to more than harmless amusement is revealed alongside the revelation of her pregnancy; indeed, the revelation of Bessie’s pregnancy results from her distress at being observed by Alick and Rachel *tête-à-tête* with a would-be lover, Mr. Carleton. The scene of Bessie’s exposure is marked by careful physical description that emphasises the lifting of shields and the workings of shamed bodies:

The terrace was prolonged into a walk beyond the screen of evergreens that shut in the main lawn, and [...] led to [...] a second field of croquet [...] no one was visible except a lady and gentleman on a seat under a tree about half-way down on the opposite side of the glade. The lady was in blue and white; the gentleman would hardly have been recognized by Rachel but for the start and thrill of her husband’s arm, and the flush of colour on his usually pale cheek; but, ere he could speak or move, the lady sprang up, and came hastening towards them diagonally across the grass. Rachel saw the danger, and made a warning outcry, ‘Bessie, the hoop!’ but it was too late, she had tripped over it, and fell prone, and entirely unable to save herself (p. 464).

²⁶ Jeffrey P. Baker, ‘Historical Perspective: The Incubator and the Medical Discovery of the Premature Infant’, *Journal of Perinatology*, 5 (2000), pp. 321–328 (p. 322).

Bessie's fall is both literal and figurative, of course. To be seen trying not to be seen, intentionally positioned behind a 'screen of evergreens' alone with a young man who is not her husband – a young man, moreover, with whom she carried on a marked flirtation before her marriage – on the scandalous croquet ground that had been the site of those flirtations is beyond the Yongian pale. Again, Bessie is not immediately espied as a person, but rather as a clothed body. That clothing – now in white and blue – still fails to conceal Bessie. No amount of cover can protect her from the danger that Rachel – uninterested in fashion and now the fortunate recipient of Alick's masculine judgment – easily perceives. The shame of the scene is legible on both Keith siblings' bodies: Alick starts, thrills, and flushes and Bessie springs and hastens away from her admirer's expression of 'ardent and lasting affection' (p. 480).

The filmic, slow-motion narration of Bessie's fall communicates that this is no simple stumble. The dire reaction of all present is clearly a response to the particular dangers of a fall to Bessie's pregnant body, though there has still been no explicit mention of this. However, Bessie's symptoms after rising heighten the implicit suggestions of her pregnancy by mapping bodily struggle onto the labour we soon learn the accident has triggered. Bessie 'move[s] with difficulty, breathing heavily' (p. 465) and a walk to the carriage 'seemed very far and very hot, her alternately excited and shame-stricken manner, and sobbing breath, much alarm[ing] Rachel' (p. 466). Indeed, it seems that Bessie's baby is born within a few hours at most of her accident.

The play of concealment and revelation is heightened immediately after this accident in such a way as to instructively prompt the reader to reconsider their sense of what has come before. Only after her death do we learn of the careless cruelty and disloyalty of her flirtation with Mr. Carleton both before and after her marriage and of the debts which she had incurred and which even her marriage to the wealthy Lord Keith did not enable her to pay. The revelation of Bessie's pregnancy occurs amidst a conflagration of revelations, all pointing back toward the lack of feminine modesty and morality that had been implicitly legible all along.

That the reader – along with every character in *The Clever Woman of the Family* excepting Alick Keith – has likely been unable to read Bessie's implicit immorality and immodesty demonstrates the necessity of this narrative lesson. In this religious, domestic novel, Bessie's charmingly "naughty" lack of adherence to perfect feminine propriety is as seductive to the reader as it is to the characters she deceives (p. 197). Our realisation that Alick – whom we may have suspected of being too harsh in his criticisms of his young, cheerful sister – was right all along has the effect of aligning his judgments with those of the quietly omniscient narrator. The revelations of Bessie's immodesty and immorality that follow the revelation of her pregnancy prompt the reader to bow to Alick's superior knowledge and judgment, as Rachel has. Reader, let the revelation of Bessie's pregnancy serve as a lesson: the harsh punishment she receives teaches belief in Alick's masculine powers of

perception and authority.²⁷ My sense of this dynamic between Alick and the reader has something to do with the way readers – prior to Bessie’s accident and death – has perceived her primarily through the admiring, but essentially blind, perspectives of those she charms. Of course, Bessie charms everyone but her brother; ‘nobody protested but Alick,’ she says (p. 198). Bessie charms womanly Lady Temple, wise Ermine Williams, and even the novel’s most sage paternal figure, the clergyman uncle she neglects. Once the limitation of our own vision is revealed, the reader is invited to join Rachel in reverencing Alick’s male authority – even Bessie herself, in delirium thrice announces, ‘Alick was right!’ (p. 473).

Alick’s ‘right’ authority seems to emanate from his eyes, which he can hardly keep open when looking on the immodesties of women. Throughout a novel rife with mentions of vision in general and Alick’s in particular, his half-closed eyes signal his judgment about Rachel’s needing to behave with greater deference to masculine authority and personal modesty. After her thorough domestication, Rachel signals that she has learned to submit to these intimations, checking herself in conversation when she ‘[finds her]self talking in the voice that always makes Alick shut his eyes’ (p. 541) and reigning in her passion for social reform when it leads Alick to ‘look [...] meeker and meeker, and assent [...] to all I said, as if he was half asleep’ (p. 542). Alick’s partially lidded eyes serve as a check on Rachel’s propensity to rush into immodesty, a bodily demonstration of the need for cover and concealment. Certainly, in order to exercise full masculine authority, Alick must generally be able to look on the world with open eyes, but, as Ermine, the novel’s true clever woman, declares, ‘the happy medium is reached, that Alick should learn to open his eyes and Rachel to shut hers’ (p. 425). Rachel achieves modest femininity by ceding to her husband’s perception the power to decide when she needs to be shielded from public

²⁷ In the context of what she calls ‘realist and non-realist’ conventions in the novel, Kim Wheatley has argued that *The Clever Woman of the Family*, though tempting to recuperate on feminist grounds, advocates (female) domesticity and demonstrates that ‘a woman’s cleverness requires both masculine and divine guidance’. See ‘Death and Domestication in Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), pp. 895-915 (pp. 895-896). In tracing critical approaches to these issues, Wheatley cites the tendency – relevant to my argument that the novel teaches its readers to respect Alick’s masculine authority via Bessie’s pregnancy – to read Bessie’s fate as instructive: Annis Gillie offered this alternative reading of Bessie’s death: ‘If the injury following her fall over a croquet hoop had been severe enough to account for the fatal collapse I doubt if she could have had a living child. Here the author’s shears were at work to eliminate a character. A motherless infant was needed to stimulate Rachel’s latent maternal instinct – and poor Bessie had to go.’ According to this argument, the novelist bends reality where one character is concerned in order to render more credible the morally correct development of another. The notion of the ‘author’s shears’ implies an author who is fully in control of her creation, deliberately killing of a relatively minor character the better to invest in a central one’. See ‘Serious and Fatal Illness in the Contemporary Novels’, in *A Chaplet for Charlotte Yonge*, ed. by Georgina Battiscombe & Margharita Laski (London: Cresset Press, 1965), pp. 897–898.

view. As a result, Rachel's pregnant body, unlike Bessie's, is treated with textual modesty.

Assuming that Rachel carries her daughter Una to term, she is one month pregnant when Bessie dies: Una, she reminds Ermine later, is eight months younger than her cousin (p. 546). Though Rachel's impending maternity does find some expression in the novel, it is primarily through the modest, moral care she offers Bessie's motherless infant. Rachel's pregnancy, if it can be said to be legible at all, is legible in the growth of what Annis Gillie calls her 'latent maternal instinct' rather than in the growth of her body or propensity for transgression.²⁸ Though there is concern about Rachel's health during this period – her mother 'hope[s] she was not knocked up by the long night journey all at one stretch' and Rachel herself 'was very uneasy about it' – that concern is explicitly embodied only in Alick's shielding illness. Rachel – whom we can know only in hindsight as "knocked up" in our current sense rather than the sense in which Ermine employs the term – wants to journey to her husband because she is 'sure he [will] be ill on Wednesday morning' though Rachel's sister hints that 'Alick might prefer a day's solitary illness to her being over-tired' (pp. 537-538). This vague anxiety about Rachel's becoming over-tired in the context of Alick's more specific illness just grazes the possible surface of her pregnancy, and is more easily read in reference to the prostration she experiences after the failure of her charitable endeavours. Like Frances' pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights*, the visible months of Rachel's first pregnancy and the entirety of her second occur off of the narrative stage. The novel cuts away from narration completely during the first half – likely the first trimester – of Rachel's pregnancy and does not pick up again for three and a half years during which time Rachel has given birth, uneventfully, to two children in complete domestic privacy. Reader, something has been concealed from you. Alick would be pleased.

²⁸ Gillie, p. 100.

Bibliography

Baker, Jeffrey P., 'Historical Perspective: The Incubator and the Medical Discovery of the Premature Infant', *Journal of Perinatology*, 5 (2000), pp. 321–328

Best, Stephen, & Marcus, Sharon, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108 (2009), pp. 1–21

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism* [1847], ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972)

Budge, Gavin, *Charlotte M. Yonge: Religion, Feminism and Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2007)

Byrne, Katherine, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Chen, Mia, "'And There Was No Helping It": Disability and Social Reproduction in Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 4 (2008) <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue42/chen.htm>>

Day, Carolyn, 'Pregnancy as Prophylactic: Discourses on Consumption and the Female Body', in *Evidence* (presented at the North American Victorian Studies Association, Pasadena, CA, 2013)

Felski, Rita, 'Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion', *M/C Journal*, 15 (2011) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/431>>

Fitzpatrick, Katherine F., 'A Document in Madness: Representations of Ophelia as Lovesick Madwoman in the Mid-Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (unpublished B.A., Mount Holyoke College, 2011)

Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994)

Gillie, Annis, 'Serious and Fatal Illness in the Contemporary Novels', in *A Chaplet for Charlotte Yonge*, ed. by Georgina Battiscombe & Margharita Laski (London: Cresset Press, 1965)

Grener, Adam, 'Coincidence as Realist Technique: Improbable Encounters and

the Representation of Selfishness in Martin Chuzzlewit', *Narrative*, 20 (2012), pp. 322–342

Hanson, Clare, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy: Pregnancy, Medicine, and Culture, 1750-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Jalland, Patricia, *Death in the Victorian Family* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Lawlor, Clark, 'Katherine Byrne, Tuberculosis and Victorian Literary Imagination' (review), in *The British Society for Literature and Science* <<http://www.bsls.ac.uk/reviews/romantic-and-victorian/katherine-byrne-tuberculosis-and-the-victorian-literary-imagination/>> [accessed 12 April 2015]

Malone, Cynthia Northcutt, 'Near Confinement: Pregnant Women in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 29 (2000), pp. 367–385

Mardorossian, Carine M., *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005)

Marland, Hilary, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Meyer, Susan, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996)

Michie, Elsie B., *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993)

Miller, J. Hillis, *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 833–844

Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992)

Ricoeur, Paul, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977)

Sanger, Charles Percy, 'The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*', in *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism*, ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 286–298

Semmelweis, Ignaz, *Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever*, trans. by K. Codell Carter (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, [1861], 1983)

Simmons, Clare A., 'Introduction', in *The Clever Woman of the Family*, by Charlotte M. Yonge (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001)

Visick, Mary, 'The Genesis of *Wuthering Heights*', in *Wuthering Heights: An authoritative Text, with Essays in Criticism*, ed. by William Merritt Sale (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 299–321

Wheatley, Kim, 'Death and Domestication in Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), pp. 895-915

Wolfreys, Julian, *Writing London, Volume 1: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998)

Yonge, Charlotte M., *The Clever Woman of the Family* [1865], ed. by Clare A. Simmons (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001)