ECO-CONSCIOUS SYNAESTHESIA: DIRT IN KINGSLEY'S *YEAST* AND *ALTON LOCKE*

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Abstract:

Miasmic language in Charles Kingsley's novels *Yeast* and *Alton Locke* imaginatively renders unseen dirt visible through synaesthesia. I suggest that Kingsley is engaging in discursive activism through consistent suggestion of the concept of miasma in these works in order to increase public anxiety about pollution. This linguistic strategy was designed to incite real action through a provocation toward what I call 'eco-consciousness' in his readers. Miasmic language gets under the skin, opening readers' eyes to anthropogenic pollution and their concomitant vulnerability to contagion. Kingsley sensationalises toxicity to uncover the environmental horrors in domestic spaces. Miasma startles fictional characters, who "see and "feel" smell, as the reader ought to be startled by miasmic language designed to stimulate or overwhelm the senses. Kingsley's fictional authors, Locke and Smith, frequently employ words from the miasmic lexicon – i.e., 'foul', 'reeking', and 'stagnant' – to describe the filth engulfing England. Though these words connote vapours, or miasmata, Kingsley broadens the concept of foul dampness from organic matter to man-made dangers, such as industrial fumes and waste particles. *Yeast*, set in the rural South, and *Alton Locke*, set in urban London, offer a complete picture of filth, revealing widespread environmental injustice.

Foul. Pestilential. Squalid. Teeming. Choking. Dust. Ash. Smoke. Fog. Filth. These words, all synonyms for dirt or dirty, clutter the pages of Victorian novels, revealing a preoccupation with toxic industrial by-products, litter, human grime, and excrement. These words also form a lexicon of miasmic language; toxic pollution described as vapour or putrid odours exposes the inescapable reach of anthropogenic pollution. Charles Kingsley's poet-tailor Alton Locke frequently employs words from the miasmic lexicon, such as 'foul', 'teeming', and 'choking', to describe the filth engulfing Victorian England, as in this description of a London night:

> Foul vapours rose from cowsheds and slaughter-houses, and the doorways of undrained alleys, where the inhabitants carried the filth out on their shoes from the back-yard into the court, and from the court up into the main street; while above, hanging like cliffs

> over the streets – those narrow, brawling torrents of filth, and poverty, and sin – the houses with their teeming load of life were piled up into the dingy choking night.[1]

Miasma startles Locke as the reader ought to be startled by miasmic language designed to stimulate or overwhelm the senses. Locke traces the dirt from the marketplace into the main street. Though this dirt is located in the slums, Kingsley reveals the complicity of the upper classes as he investigates the social causes of dirt.

Far from an exclusively lower class problem, pollution emerges as a universal experience. In *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850), Kingsley imaginatively renders the unseen visible through sensation. Privileging sensory evidence of pollution, specifically smell, miasmic language permeates throughout the Victorian novel to expose networks of disease and the vital need for a protected environment. This technique that I refer to as eco-conscious synaesthesia urges readers to feel the sights and smells of environmental degradation through visceral reactions to graphic description. Miasmic language provokes a physical response to dirt. Kingsley's protagonists often retch or feel faint when confronted by filth, and readers may find themselves wincing or shuddering as they imagine the scene. By diffusing anxiety-producing representations to incite action, these novels participate in discursive activism: opposition to hegemonic thought circulated through conversations and publications in order to instigate reform. Like the filth that invades the main street, literature brings filth before public view, confronting readers in their homes. The pernicious presence of miasma gets under the skin, opening readers' eyes to anthropogenic pollution and their own vulnerability to contagion.

While Kingsley's synaesthesia sensationalises dirt to advocate environmental conservation, he goes further than most Victorian sanitation reformers, by asking his readers to literally awaken to an enlarged worldview. Kingsley preaches an ethical awareness of the current of exchange between the human body and its environment, what I call “eco-consciousness”, throughout

[1] Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke*. ed. by Elizabeth A. Cripps (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 87. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

his literature. He rejected 'conceited' anthropocentrism, and in his first work of natural history, *Glaucus, or the Wonders of the Shore* (1855), he repines:

> Alas for the pride of human genius, and the autotheism which would make man the measure of all things and the centre of the universe! All the invaluable laws and methods of sanatory [*sic*] reform at best are but clumsy imitations of the unseen wonders which every animalcule and leaf have been working since the world's foundation, with this slight difference between them and us, that they fulfill their appointed task, and we do not.[2]

That is, if human beings understood their place in nature, they would see the cause-and-effect relationships leading to pollution and reform their 'conceited' and toxic behaviour.

Mundane Horrors: Sensationalising Dirt

Victorian literature's emphasis on dirt critiqued industry and overcrowding. Authors foregrounded visible forms of dirt (offal, dung, mud, smoke) and challenged themselves to portray invisible forms of dirt (germs, toxins, noxious fumes). As David Trotter has theorised, smell emerges as a trope of nineteenth-century sanitation literature intended to provoke anxiety in the reader, while William Cohen has shown that the representation of dirt took various forms 'ranging from slums to contagious diseases to pestiferous rivers'.[3] Dirt, whether rendered as vapour, fluid, or corporeal, signified disease. Miasma theory, voiced famously by the sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick, cautioned that 'all smell is disease', that the smell emanating from contaminated water,

[2] Charles Kingsley, *Glaucus; or The Wonders of the Shore*, 4th Ed. (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1859), p. 121, 163.

[3] David Trotter, 'The New Historicism and the Psychopathology of Everyday Modern Life' in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 30–48; William A. Cohen, 'Introduction: Locating Filth', in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. vii–xxxvii (p. xxi).

foul air, dust heaps, and the unwashed masses sickened those who breathed it in. Though germ theory later revealed that disease was spread by contagious micro-organisms passed from person to person, the associated smells nevertheless successfully identified the primary environmental factors of improper sanitation and poor hygiene. We see above that Kingsley locates foul vapours in slaughterhouses, undrained alleys, and backyards. This is important as regards miasma theory, since miasmata originally designated organic ("natural") hazards emanating from swampy or damp conditions. Kingsley recasts miasma as man-made, anthropogenic emissions. While dirt and human by-products like excrement and waste are arguably natural, they become unnatural when they overwhelm the environment due to overcrowding and reckless disposal. Creatively portraying miasma gave tangible form to intangible contagions and environmental deterioration.

Ultimately, smell opens the eyes. Kingsley, as with many Victorian authors including Dickens and Gaskell, "sensationalises" dirt to uncover the environmental horrors in domestic spaces. While the genres of realism and sensation were often considered antithetical, as Anthony Trollope insisted in his autobiography, '[a] good novel should be both, and thus 'many realists employ sensational tactics to impress on their readers the "truth" of fictional representations. Victorian commentators struggled to define sensation fiction, however; they predominantly identified sensation novels 'by their bodily impact on readers, who find when reading them that "the flesh creeps"'.[4] The essay 'Sensation Novels' from the *Quarterly Review*, attributed to H. L. Mansel, cynically examines the widespread appeal of sensation novels during their heyday, the 1860s. He disparagingly asserts the genre 'preach[es] to the nerves [seeking] [e]xcitement, and excitement alone', some novels 'aspire to set his [the reader's] hair on end or his teeth on edge; while others [...] are strongly provocative of that sensation in the palate and throat which is a premonitory symptom of nausea'.[5] Sacrilegiously wielding the power of the pulpit, the genre 'mould[s] the minds and form[s] the habits and tastes of its generation'.[6]

[4] Ellen Miller Casey, "'Highly Flavoured Dishes" and "Highly Seasoned Garbage": Sensation in the *Athenaeum'* in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*. ed. by Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 3–14 (p. 4).

[5] 'Sensation Novels', *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 113, No. 226 (1863), 482–514, p. 482, p. 487. Such physical responses are usually evoked by "horrors" mined from newspaper accounts of crime and vice. Mansel provides a litany of examples of sensational incidents drawn from Collins, Braddon,

Kingsley, however, writes with didactic purpose and invites the contagious spread of his ideas via literature that exploits sensation for precisely the reasons that Mansel condemns it – namely, a lasting reaction in the reader. Miasmic language blurs the boundaries between sensation and realism. The influential eco-critic Lawrence Buell describes the 'gothicization of public health issues', lurid portrayals of environmental squalor to produce fear, citing Dickens's *Hard Times* and Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as exemplars.[7] By Gothicisation, Buell means exaggerated and shocking description. While Buell identifies the atmosphere as something worth considering, what he fails to recognise is the domestication of this atmosphere, a particularly Victorian gesture that characterises sensation fiction. Patrick Brantlinger identifies the 'sensation' in sensation fiction as the mysteries lurking in the shadows of every street and in the respectable Victorian home. Subversive by uncovering the evils hidden beneath Victorian propriety, the sensation novel exposes that 'truth has been hidden, buried, smuggled away behind the appearances'.[8] In other words, novelists interpret signs that readers have failed to comprehend in their own world. Like the sensation novelist, then, Kingsley deliberately intends to provoke discomfort and nausea, relying on miasmic language to render visible the ubiquity of pollution. What seems to rescue him from the brand of sensation that Mansel describes is Kingsley's focus on *mundane* horrors. This at first seems to be a paradox, but dirt becomes horrifying *because* it is commonplace.

Victorian literary critics have widely examined the metaphorical resonances of dirt – filth may indicate moral decay, usually in the lower classes, emblematising their primitiveness, licentiousness, or idleness.[9] My work

and even Dickens: the suspense evoked by hidden identities, near-death experiences, frenzied and violent exchanges, and hair's breadth escapes that 'carry the whole nervous system by steam.' The essay identifies two classes of sensation fiction:' those that are written merely for amusement, and those that are written with didactic purpose' (p. 487). Interestingly, Mansel distrusts the latter precisely because of the genre's substantial influence over its readers. He feels the morals or lessons are not worth teaching; i.e., defending bigamous unions or the rights of illegitimate children.

6 'Sensation Novels', p. 482. Mansel conceives of the 'morbid''appetite for sensation as a 'moral disease'.

7 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), p. 43.

8 Patrick Brantlinger, 'What Is "Sensational" About The "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37.1 (1982), pp. 118 (pp. 26–7).

9 Michelle Allen, for instance, demonstrates that sanitary reformers were equally interested in purifying the soul and the body, and her readings of Dickens's and Gissing's works reveal dirt's

attempts to re-orient examinations of dirt towards its literal meanings; though Kingsley championed the plight of the demoralised working classes, he nevertheless focuses on actual dirt and the reality that disease is *not* symptomatic of immoral behaviour; it can be prevented by practical attention to hygiene and cleanliness. Looking again to the description of the marketplace, filth travels from the slums into the main street. Kingsley insists that dirt cannot be repudiated, Othered or quarantined.[10] It cannot be ascribed to the working class alone. This evil invades respectable avenues and homes, and even if the visible dirt is cleared away, the sinister threat of contagion remains. Kingsley's sensational use of synaesthesia focuses on smell to help the reader "see" and feel the unobserved or invisible health risks in the environment; his explicit references to faeces, death, and decay intend to incite a sensational response for moral purpose.

In this way, Kingsley encouraged eco-consciousness, an ethical perception of humanity's intermingling with the environment made possible through keen vision, what George Perkins Marsh famously distinguished as 'seeing' rather than merely 'looking' in *Man and Nature* (1864). Kingsley wants his readers to truly see dirt, to see the consequences of introducing filth into the environment, and to see the suffering caused by that contamination. Dirt indiscriminately disseminates through England's permeable borders, just as the novel itself metaphorically tracks dirt into the home, into popular discourse. Kingsley's eco-conscious synaesthesia demands environmental justice.

Yeast: Rural Dirt

Charles Kingsley was a man of many trades: professor of history at Cambridge, Anglican priest, Christian socialist, poet, novelist, naturalist, and social

function as a metaphor that muddies the distinction between physical disease and moral disease. Her exemplar of the sanitary novelist, Kingsley, 'conducted a lifelong campaign to redeem the social and spiritual condition of the poor by improving their physical condition' – see *Cleansing the City*: *Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 14, p. 15.

[10] Cohen and Mary Douglas have shown that 'filth' is a condemnatory word for dirt, carrying moral overtones that ascribe 'filth' to the other, to the working classes as if they are a separate race, morally culpable for the rank conditions in factories and slums. Cohen, p. ix; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, Routledge, 1966).

reformer. J. M. I. Klaver observes of Kingsley's participation in many intellectual arenas that he 'was a public figure who was listened to'.[11] Non-fiction works such as 'How to Study Natural History' (1846), *Glaucus* (1855), and *Town Geology* (1872) reveal his commitment to factual, accurate representation as well as his firm belief in evolution, so much so that Piers J. Hale dubs him 'Darwin's other bulldog'.[12] His studies earned him a place in both the Linnaean and Geological Societies, and his 1870 article in the journal *Nature* was even cited by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Kingsley was personally able to reconcile religion and science, and preached that man was part of, not apart from, nature. His belief in humanity's kinship with other species and the brotherhood of humanity undergirds his Christian Socialism. Christopher Hamlin, in his ecocritical analysis of Kingsley's works, writes that Kingsley preached the combination of 'consciousness and conscience', fostered in an organic community wherein Christians live in accordance with natural law (God's law).[13] Klaver underscores Kingsley's firm belief that 'fresh air and pure water did much towards removing the ills of society. This idea is based on a kind of environmental awareness which stems from an adequate knowledge of the workings of natural processes: [such] an ecological stance is closely linked to Kingsley's sanitary work'.[14]

Kingsley's novels, known for their descriptive qualities, were influenced by the method of natural history that demanded careful observation, recorded with minute truthfulness.[15] We see this type of painstaking description in Kingsley's first novel. Written during the second cholera epidemic in England (the horrors of which Kingsley witnessed first-hand as he ministered to

[11] J. M. I. Klaver, *The Apostle of the Flesh: A Critical Life of Charles Kingsley* (Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 3.

[12] Piers J. Hale, 'Darwin's Other Bulldog: Charles Kingsley and the Popularisation of Evolution in Victorian England', *Science & Education* 21.7 (2012), pp. 97–113.

[13] Christopher Hamlin, 'Charles Kingsley: From Being Green To Green Being', *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Social, Political, And Cultural Studies* 54.2 (2012), pp.255–81 (p. 271).

[14] Klaver, p. 363, p. 361.

[15] Mary Wheat Hanawalt also reflects that Kingsley's scientific enthusiasm is 'almost their [his novels] *raison d' être'*. 'Kingsley was primarily interested in science because it could ameliorate the condition of mankind', proving that disease is curable, rather than part of God's plan for humanity. She further suggests that science – and Kingsley's 'desire for its widespread appreciation and application' – unifies the chaotic plot of *Yeast*, 'Charles Kingsley And Science', *Studies In Philology* 34 (1937), pp. 589–611 (p. 593, p. 607, p. 594). Here, I revisit Kingsley's scientific background in relation to contemporary eco-criticism.

patients in his parish) and just as the government crushed the Chartist movement, *Yeast: A Problem* announces itself as a social problem novel through its sub-title.[16] Kingsley was directly inspired by the 1843 Blue Book, a 'Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture' and its explicit, emotional details of the suffering of the labouring classes.[17] His novel provides the literary counterpart to Commissioners' reports and the sanitary journalism of the public health movement. Lauded as 'the "essential" Kingsley' and his 'seminal' work,[18] *Yeast* establishes a set of eco-conscious thematic concerns that persist throughout Kingsley's career. Writing to J. M. Ludlow in November 1849, Kingsley lamented that newspaper accounts, particularly Henry Mayhew's disturbing article in the *Morning Chronicle* about the cholera districts of Bermondsey earlier that year, had 'produced no effect'.[19] Prompted to take up his own pen, Kingsley poured graphic detail into 'some of the most popular of Victorian popular literature', reaching the masses more effectively than even his own journal articles and tracts.[20]

Though the city dominates sanitary narratives in the period, *Yeast* brings economic causes of pollution into a rural setting, removed from the factory system. Graphic portrayals of filth de-idealise the countryside, discrediting the image of a pastoral, peaceful country in contrast to a corrupt, chaotic city. Far from enlisting the pastoral as foil to identify toxicity in urban environments, Kingsley exposes that similar working conditions and environmental hazards exist in the country. The novel's attention to toxicity heralds the modern environmental justice movement, which insists upon all people's equal right to live and work in a healthy environment. Environmental justice activists critique the world's unequal distribution of wealth and its connection to an unequal distribution of environmental devastation. Many Victorian novelists similarly demonstrate how labourers, often confined to pestilential residential

16 Charles and Frances Eliza Grenfell Kingsley, *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memoires of His Life*, 2 vols. (London: H.S. King & Co., 1877), I, p. 217.
See Sheila M. Smith, 'Blue Books and Victorian Novelists', *The Review of English Studies* 21.81 (Feb., 1970), pp. 23–40.
18 Larry K. Uffelman, *Charles Kingsley* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 48; Allen J. Hartley, *The Novels of Charles Kingsley: A Christian Social Interpretation* (Folkestone: Hour-Glass Press, 1977), p. 61.
19 Kingsley and Kingsley, p. 216.
20 Edward R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 13.

areas, suffer from pollution disproportionately to their employers or social superiors who migrate to cleaner neighbourhoods. Environmental justice activists consider the way issues of race, class, and gender affect environmental conditions, prompting citizens to mobilise by offering politicised accounts of personal hardship. Novels featuring pollution and subsequent illness, in their emphasis on individual suffering (particularly of women and children) and class discrimination share these concerns, and, whether written during the nineteenth century or now, can function as discursive activism.[21] Though his stories are fictional, Kingsley draws from actual fact to widen concern about environmental abuses.

Lancelot Smith, an independently wealthy gentleman, witnesses economic disparity between estate workers and owners, maturing from an idealistic view of life to a pragmatic awareness of social problems and human beings' dependence on a clean environment. His name, a mixture of the romantic and prosaic, suggests this transition. As a proxy for the reader, he tours the South of England, guided by the Chartist gamekeeper Tregarva, whose lengthy lectures comprise much of the plot. Staying on Squire Lavington's estate, Smith quickly falls in love with his daughter Argemone, a beautiful snob who believes in liberal theories without actually practising charity. Kingsley pokes fun at his characters with authorial interjections, often interrupting pictures of frivolous upper-class life, with its superficial melancholy, to present social reality. The novel quickly moves from romance to realism, chronicling Smith's "conversion" to social reformer through exposure to the squalid homes and habits of the working class.[22]

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[21] Mary Katzenstein defines discursive activism as the 'effort to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practices of society and state', challenging the flawed assumptions of mainstream discourse. See *Faithful and Fearless: Moving Feminist Protest inside the Church and Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 17. As Stacey Young has shown, feminism has a strong tradition of discursive political activism, whether through consciousness-raising groups or iconoclastic publications, and more recently Frances Shaw has written about the politics of online blogs; however, other social movements such as environmentalism clearly engage in discursive activism as well. Stacey Young, *Changing the Wor(L)D: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Frances Shaw, 'The Politics of Blogs: Theories of Discursive Activism Online', *Media International Australia*, No. 141 (2012), pp. 41–9. Kingsley availed himself of multiple mediums to circulate his ideas: the pulpit, the classroom, and the press.

[22] P.G. Scott and Larry K. Uffelman review the extensive revisions to *Yeast* between its original appearance as six monthly instalments serialised in *Fraser's Magazine* (July–December 1848) and its 1851 book form. Kingsley enlarges the conversion narrative focusing on Luke to deepen the

Tregarva confronts Smith with reality, correcting Smith's impressions of beauty, citing '[f]ever, and ague, and rheumatism' (p. 26) spread by the 'white fog', which unlike the bearable river-damps, are of 'man's sending' and unendurable (p. 36). Tregarva specifies human agency as the culprit behind toxic dirt, carefully distinguishing between river-damp and toxic effluvia.[23] He observes, 'A man's eyes can only see what they've learnt to see' (p. 38); sympathetic clergymen and landlords 'see the evils, and yet they don't see them. They do not see what is the matter with the poor man' (p. 233). In other words, they do not see like the naturalist with eco-consciousness. Tregarva thus brings Smith to experience first-hand the "reeking" village atmosphere, because the only way to see is to smell, taste, touch, and hear. Smith, sheltered by his elite education, had expected beauty, 'pastoral sentiment', 'innocent, simple enjoyment', and is startled by the dirty reality of the 'stale', rotten, 'reeking' atmosphere, and the 'half-articulate', 'guttural' speech of the primitive labouring classes who stay perpetually drunk to drown out the drudgery of their existence (p. 190). What is the matter is not an innate predilection for sin or vice. Kingsley implies successive generations of inadequate food and shelter have poisoned blood" betraying an anxiety about de-evolution. A polluted environment pollutes the body and turns the blood. Kingsley claims, 'Whatsoever may seem extravagant or startling is most likely to be historic fact, else I should not have dared to write it down, finding God's actual dealings here much too wonderful to dare to invent many fresh ones for myself' (p. 15). Kingsley contends that reality *is* sensational, even more horrifying than the melodramatic ingredients of sensation novels precisely because it is "fact". Nauseated by the assault on his senses exposing rural dirt, Smith also displays discomfort at his kinship to these revellers, realising, through Tregarva's

novel's disapproval of Catholicism and to increase its didactic tone. 'Kingsley's Serial Novels: Yeast', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 9 (1976), pp. 111–19. However, Lancelot's "conversion" remains central, and ecology is arguably the axis of his change.

[23] In addition to incorporating "man-made: dangers into miasma theory, Kingsley also insists upon human agency because it indicates that toxic conditions and subsequent disease are *preventable*, rather than divinely ordained. He resumes this argument in his fifth novel, *Two Years Ago* (1857), in which the hero, Tom Thurnall, champions the cause of sanitary reform despite fierce opposition from the townspeople against his meddling. The residents of Aberalva, particularly the dissenters, stubbornly believe that cholera is a visitation from God to punish sinfulness, and therefore cannot be circumvented. This, too, shows the fallacy of regarding dirt as a problem of moral or spiritual pollution rather than hygiene and ecological ignorance. The novel acerbically denounces the pride and ignorance of the townspeople who thwart public health officials from making necessary improvements.

explanations, that he is not inherently different from them, but born in better circumstances.

Tregarva writes an inflammatory poem voicing the plight of his comrades. In the first stanza, he accuses the gentry of making poaching necessary by denying work and adequate money, and then subsequently punishing poachers. He describes the 'reeking', overcrowded, dilapidated cottages that provide little shelter from the elements, which, by preventing the ill from working, increases their poverty until the master sends them to the workhouse. The labourers are worse fed and housed than the estate's livestock and hunting hounds (p. 148). The poem describes the role of landlords and employers in creating toxic conditions, effectually rewriting 'filth' to be the fault of the gentry, not the working classes. Likely correcting the impression of many of the novel's readers, Tregarva explains that outdoors or agrarian work under such oppressive conditions is no healthier than factory work. The clean, idyllic environment Smith expected is only found on the areas of the estate occupied by the wealthy.

Social problem novels commonly uncover the inadequacy of Victorian philanthropy. Tregarva explains that visible problems receive immediate relief: sympathetic passers-by 'pull out their purses fast enough', but these 'charitable people' are unable to make the connection between the poor that they see, and the thousands more that they do not. Tregarva highlights the difference between one or two unfortunate cases, and a prevailing social problem happening 'all the year round' (p. 37). Individual acts of charity, while appreciated, are no match for a massively harmful social system. These labourers are not out of work because of a flaw on their part that they can correct; they are born into a class prohibited from reaping the benefits of work and consigned to unhealthy spaces. Tregarva successfully convinces Smith of these distinctions, and it is Smith's subsequent decision to write about these revelations that potentially circulates them widely.[24] The narrative's use of

[24] Smith's conversion at this juncture entails dropping 'all faith in anything but Nature' (p. 126). Kingsley criticises the Church for ignoring material needs to minister to the soul. The novel's theme of religious hypocrisy speaks a powerful message about environmental justice. It is unacceptable that 'in a country calling itself civilised and Christian, pestilence should be the peculiar heritage of the poor!' (p. 220). Tregarva recognises that contagious diseases are 'confined to the poor', 'while the rich, by the mere fact of money, are exempt from such curses, except when they come in contact with those whom they call on Sunday "their brethren", and on week days "the masses"' (p. 220).

miasmic language strives for a parallel conversion in readers, who "seeing" smell may, too, become eco-conscious. Kingsley invites his readers' participation: his book itself is 'from beginning to end, as in name, so in nature, Yeast – an honest sample of the questions, which, good or bad, are fermenting in the minds of the young of this day, and are rapidly leavening the minds of the rising generation' (p. 135). Kingsley deploys a metaphor of fermenting yeast to suggest how polemical ideas may multiply through word of mouth, similar to the function of miasmic language in spreading a public conversation about environmental contamination. The young dictate the nation's destiny, and Kingsley looks outward to his audience for cures for pollution.

When Squire Lavington hears of Tregarva's poem, instead of feeling shame or remorse, or even pausing for a moment to consider the truth of the verses, he rages over Tregarva's audacity and disloyalty. He subsequently dies of apoplexy, unenlightened, and this begins a series of sensational incidents as Argemone, finally reaching out to the suffering poor, contracts a fatal case of typhus, and a 'mysterious' and 'agonising' disease afflicts her sister, Honoria.[25] This literally demonstrates the upper classes' susceptibility to contagion. However, the town attributes the deaths to the 'nun's curse' upon the Lavingtons for their neglect of the poor (p. 241). Though even folklore considers their fate as divine retribution for ignoring environmental injustice, Kingsley 'preaches to the nerves' to suggest that underneath this superstition is the ecological lesson that disease defies class barriers, and the treatment of the labouring classes *will* affect the nation as a whole.

Smith leaves with Tregarva to 'the country of Prester John', the fabled Christian nation in the Orient. This mysticism is partly why *Yeast* has not enjoyed the attention of other Victorian novels. Kingsley, leaving the story open-ended, refuses to 'draw the horoscope of the Whitford poor, or any others. Really that depends principally on yourselves' (p. 269). He 'advocates the ideals of cooperation and brotherhood as the solution to the pressing issues of his age', which, as John Kijinksi points out, typifies an ideological stance shared by Victorian writers on social issues, 'the belief that the increasing

[25] Kingsley wrote the Squire's death into his revision of the text from its serial form, as well as revoking Honoria's happier ending. Scott and Uffelman seemingly regard these changes as less 'important' than the expansion of Luke's story (p. 118), yet they are actually quite instrumental in reinforcing the novel's didactic purpose (while also introducing plot points that again demonstrate Kingsley's use of 'sensational' tactics).

hostility between rich and poor could be ameliorated [...] if only members of all classes could increase their imaginative sympathy and communicate with each other in a more humane manner'. He continues, 'the condition of England will improve only once individual citizens of England understand that all human beings must be viewed as members of the family that is ruled by a common Father, and that each person must willingly take responsibility for the well-being of the members of this family'.[26] Kijinksi describes Kingsley's Christian Socialist beliefs, which also serve as a vehicle for an ecological imperative. All classes belong to the same human family; we are 'all animals after all' (p. 25), and contagious disease and environmental contamination that threaten one group become threats to all.[27] Miasmic language, with its emphasis on networks, demonstrates this eco-consciousness. Kingsley's use of eco-conscious synaesthesia reveals environmental injustice to mobilise lasting reform, not temporary charity.

Alton Locke: Urban Dirt

In *Yeast*, illness reveals the inexorable connection between classes, and miasmic language verbalises the perpetual fog of filth afflicting the English. Alton Locke similarly stitches his tale together; the common ecological problems of his age function as the pieces that, when brought together, reveal the interconnections between urban and rural, poor and rich. The "propaganda novel" *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* encapsulates the Hungry Forties.[28] Written eight years before the Great Stink would force legislators into addressing London's degradation, the novel aggressively confronts its readers with unflinching portrayals of filth. Kingsley's graphic descriptions distinguish his fiction from that of Gaskell, whose descriptions of poorly drained cellars in *Mary Barton* (1848) seem tame in comparison, and

[26] John L. Kijinksi, 'Charles Kingsley's Yeast: Brotherhood And The Condition Of England', *VIJ: Victorians Institute Journal* 13 (1985), pp. 97–109; p. 98, pp. 98–99.

[27] *The Guardian*'s review of the novel acknowledges the success of Kingsley's social protest, particularly his demonstration of the moral necessity of recognising kinship with the poor. The review praises Kingsley's ability to '[see] clearly many evils of which most people have but dim and vague conceptions.' Qtd. in Klaver, p. 158.

[28] Klaver, p. 216.

from that of Dickens, whose euphemistic use of words like 'dust' for 'dung' failed to startle. The closest Dickens comes to recognising filth on Kingsley's scale are the dust-heaps in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5).

Locke, a tailor by trade and poet by inclination, suffers from damaged lungs. He regards his Cockney heritage as God's gift

> that I might learn to feel for poor wretches who sit stifled in reeking garrets and workrooms, drinking in disease with every breath, – bound in their prison-house of brick and iron, with their own funeral pall hanging over them, in that canopy of fog and poisonous smoke, from their cradle to their grave. (pp. 5-6)

Each breath imbibes dirt and disease; Locke portrays the workshop as an infectious prison, improperly maintained by owners looking to maximise profit without regard for human health. Locke confidently identifies the cause of his ailing body as exposure to poisoned fumes and inadequate ventilation. In these passages he emphasises smog and dirty, overcrowded spaces, 'reeking with human breath', creating a miasma in itself. In his descriptions, Kingsley once again attempts to give physical form to pathogens. Locke identifies social causes for his disease: 'I think that it was the will of the world and of the devil, of man's avarice and laziness and ignorance [...]. A sanitary reformer would not be long in guessing the cause of my unhealthiness' (p. 6). Catherine Gallagher suggests that 'Alton seems obsessed with a great contradictory truth [...]: man is free yet determined'.[29] Even while exercising his or her own free will, a person's environment inevitably dictates the outcome of his/her decisions. Kingsley proves the suffering of the poor to be an environmentally determined evil. Humanity's avarice, a devil embodying capitalism, creates the conditions that weaken Locke's constitution. He views his talents as a means to expose social inequality and environmental pollution through miasmic language, demonstrating the point early on that the poor bear the burden of pollution. Locke's autobiography, like Kingsley's novel, exposes preventable

[29] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 95.

environmental injustice to his reader's vision, and his sensational descriptions of toxicity intend to jolt readers into action.

Despite his narrow sphere of observation, Locke studies 'natural objects' with 'intense keenness' (p. 9). He longs for the tropical climates described by missionaries, contrasting the exotic, wondrous scenery with his 'little dingy, foul, reeking, twelve-foot square back-yard, where huge smoky party-walls shut out every breath of air and almost all the light of heaven' (p. 14). Kingsley's repeated use of the word 'reeking' signals his sensitivity to smell, so even when describing water, he frames the problem as toxic air to create a sense of claustrophobia. He attempts to study his local pond, in truth the buildings' water supply, dirty fluid 'crusted with soot and alive with insects, to be renewed only three times in the seven days' (p. 14). Even the teeming insects prove a type of filth that dramatises toxicity, perhaps standing-in for the invisible germs infecting the water much as *Punch* that same year illustrated a magnified 'Drop of London Water' as crowded with microscopic "pests" to represent germs. Dubious "wonders" are revealed under a microscope. To the Seer it is explained

> how the pure fluid differs from the liquid constituting the Thames, and from that which exists in metropolitan wells, when the former has received the contents of sewers, and the latter the oozings of intramural graveyards. Some delicate subjects, even of the male sex, cannot endure this process, it affecting them with faintness and nausea. [30]

In fact, the sight is intended to nauseate. Similarly to the Seer, as Locke searches for specimens, 'all of a sudden the horror of the place came over [him]; those grim prison-walls above, with their canopy of lurid smoke; the dreary, sloppy, broken pavement; the horrible stench of the stagnant cesspools; the utter want of form, colour, life, in the whole place, crushed me down' (p. 14). Experiencing synaesthesia, Locke *feels* the stench as a debilitating weight. Here is Locke's moment of recognition: "horror" – dirt – originates in England,

[30] Anon., 'A Drop of London Water', *Punch* Vol. 18 (1850), p. 188.

in his own backyard. Locke transposes the canopy of the rainforest into thick smoke, revealing the perversion in the East End. The only "wonders" in this tiny backyard are monstrous insects ('great larvae' breeding in the water) and the filth suffocates Locke's ambition to be a naturalist, while prompting him to share these discoveries with a blind populace. We can see how Kingsley's references to "exotic" locales gain increased significance by reading this scene in light of the recent cholera epidemic. A disease that originated in India, 'Asiatic cholera took shape in the Victorian imagination as an Oriental raider, a barbaric force whose progress westward exposed the weak spots of an expanding industrial culture'. Soon, the popular press began imagining cholera as the lord of the English slum. Social critics, including Kingsley, 'agreed that England was mass-producing a distinctly exotic squalor out of its own ill-disposed waste'. [31]

Locke transfers his naturalist energies to his method of literary representation. He continually demonstrates clear causal relationships to awaken eco-consciousness in the reader. There are numerous passages describing the unsanitary, dangerous, and suffocating conditions of London's workshops, homes, and streets, such as the tailor's workshop, which Kingsley likens to a hospital. Each floor nourishes a type of illness: dampness breeds rheumatism; exposure to cesspools leads to typhoid and dysentery; close, thick air clouded with sweat and fabric particles causes asthma and consumption (p. 25). None of these illnesses are 'natural'. The workshop, a microcosm of the larger city, shows the man-made origin of these illnesses, which are propagated through careless relations with the environment. Once again, Kingsley broadens the miasma concept to not only include any type of hazardous air-borne substance (sweat, sewage, mildew, dust), but to go beyond the popular fear of smell, as some of the dangers are both odourless (fabric) and invisible (germs).

Describing a foggy night in Bermondsey, Kingsley exposes environmental contaminants. He illustrates the way the city distorts the natural:

[31] Erin O'Connor, *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 22, p. 30.

> From the butchers' and greengrocers' shops the gas-lights flared and flickered, wild and ghastly, over haggard groups of slip-shod dirty women, bargaining for scraps of stale meat and frostbitten vegetables, wrangling about short weight and bad quality. Fish-stalls and fruit-stalls lined the edge of the greasy pavement, sending up odours as foul as the language of sellers and buyers. Blood and sewer-water crawled from under doors and out of spouts, and reeked down the gutters among offal, animal and vegetable, in every stage of putrefaction (p. 87).

Gas, rotting meat and vegetables, overflowing cesspools, manure, and human sweat create the dirty fog engulfing the neighbourhood; this sensory miasmic language demonstrates filth's contagious properties. Kingsley often uses the word 'crawling', embodying toxicity as monstrous. 'Teeming' like so many insects, the inhabitants cannot afford the luxury of cleanliness (p. 87). One may say the swarm of people becomes another re-imagining of miasma. Perpetually carrying filth on their shoes and in their groceries, they ignore the causal relationships Kingsley is eager to render. Cholera was most often contracted through swallowing infected water, but food such as Kingsley describes was also a carrier of the bacteria, which could last for days in meat, dairy products, and produce.

The urban market reveals another invisible reality of London, the chaotic presence of "rural" activities. Kingsley's rhetoric echoes his assessment of Locke's London yard: abuse ruins what should be beautiful. Like the human inhabitants, the animals are kept in close confinement, improperly fed, and cruelly used. Here, violations of the land (the build-up of trash, dirt, and manure) pollute the environment as a whole. Cesspools spill over onto the ground, polluting the land from within by seeping through the soil into groundwater. The barnyard conditions engender squalor, but the city's insanitariness also harms the animals' health. They cannot thrive any better than the people, imbibing ash-coated food and fetid water. Grown at a great distance, produce spoils before it reaches the table. As Hamlin asserts, Kingsley denied the consciousness of a 'nature separate from human involvement',

forcing the confrontation between the human and nonhuman realms.[32] Kingsley's scene shows the reliance on healthy land for survival. Londoners suffer from imported or poor quality crops and livestock inadequately cared for. In blunt terms, Londoners poison themselves by failing to separate their dirt from their food.

Kingsley roots his moral melodrama in everyday, if ghastly, realities. P. J. Keating finds this particular scene so successful because Kingsley withholds commentary and lets the details, which are horrifying enough, speak for themselves. He argues, 'Kingsley's sole intention is [...] to re-create the feeling of repulsion experienced by himself [...]. [It] is notable that Kingsley has deliberately chosen what would normally be a fairly gay scene – a street market at its busiest moment, Saturday evening [and] makes no attempt whatsoever' to moderate the uncomfortable realities. Kingsley chooses the market as 'typical working-class London as a whole: it is not simply an isolated plague spot'. These descriptions, in Keating's words, that 'grip the reader and stir his conscience' characterise the Victorian use of miasmic language and the veracity essential to the novel's confrontation with the actual environment.[33] Kingsley aims to induce the physical sensation of repulsion. In his grotesque market scene, Kingsley represents actual, disturbing facts, implying that the "real" will be "sensational" as long as such evils exist.

In Victorian London, the workers lack opportunities of engagement with healthy environments. One labourer in a "sweaters den" raves, 'when will I get out to the fresh air? For five months I haven't seen the blessed light of the sun' (p. 201). Maddened by his imprisonment in the carceral city, Jemmy Downes attempts to jump off Waterloo Bridge. After being prevented by Locke, Downes, intoxicated with gin and toxic water, leads Locke to a rat-infested, putrid den above a sewer. In far and away the most lurid scene, Downes confesses to killing his family by allowing them to live in claustrophobic quarters. His family succumbs to the 'fever devils', the noxious vapour rising from the sewer below, and the sensory description of the 'hot breaths' of miasma uncovers visible and invisible threats – the dirt covering the floor and the infectious germs emanating from unsanitary conditions.

[32] Hamlin, p. 258.
[33] P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 20.

Locke first experiences the smell: 'The stench was frightful – the very air heavy with pestilence. The first breath I drew made my heart sink, and my stomach turn' (p. 332). Air, land, and water pollution converge in this house of horror, where the environment revenges itself upon human beings for their abuse. The contamination of the water with excrement and industrial fluids contaminates the air, and pollution of the land *is* pollution of the water, as litter clogs rivers and cesspools. Locke forgets his discomfort (the smell) upon seeing the three corpses on the floor: Downes's wife and her two children, half-devoured by rodents. Downes wails,

> "I watched 'em dying! Day after day I saw the devils come up through the cracks, like little maggots and beetles, all manner of ugly things, creeping down their throats; and I asked 'em, and they said they were the fever devils." It was too true; the poisonous exhalations had killed them. The wretched man's delirium tremens had given that horrible substantiality to the poisonous fever gases (p. 332).

Downes imagines contagion as embodied insects: since 'fever' and 'gas' (or the germs and viruses at their core) are largely invisible, Downes uses metaphor to articulate the cause of his family's misfortunes. Both literal insects and nightmarish hallucinations of insects representing toxins invade the body, "creeping" into their lungs. Locke implies Downes suffers from typhus, known to cause delirium. 'All manner of ugly things' creates the miasma, a myriad of pestilential particles including sewer gases, industrial fumes, and the insects that feed on human flesh and reside in their clothes and hair (p. 332). Kingsley's use of adjectives like 'heavy' and verbs like 'crawling' attempt to give a stable form to miasma. Novelists faced a problem when trying to render evanescent miasma real to audiences; Kingsley's intense descriptions give 'horrible substantiality' to invisible or microscopic toxins, encouraging an eco-consciousness in the reader that will allow them to recognise these dangers in the actual world.

Locke suggests Downes drink water instead of gin, only to learn that the sewer water is the sole option. Gin becomes a necessity, a desperate effort to

mask the taste of the 'hell-broth' and combat nausea. Running to fetch water to illustrate his point, Downes falls into the foul sewer, suffocating in the stench as much as drowning. The water, 'as opaque as stone', engulfs and hides his body (p. 333). There is no euphemism here as Downes drowns in shit.

Kingsley employs sensationalism in the cause of environmental justice. At the novel's end, Locke's highborn cousin will die of typhus fever, contracted from the coat he commissioned, the same coat Downes was working on, and used to cover the corpses of his family.[34] Alan Rauch observes, 'It is, after all, fabric itself that is the vector for disease between the ill-used tailors and the upper classes for whom they must work'; his analysis points to the metaphorical contamination of the cloth, which patterns this exploitation.[35] Cloth, itself a kind of web, becomes another way to represent contagion and ecological connections. Environmental injustices cannot be quarantined in the poorer districts. The fleas and lice birthed out of the "great unwashed" (the exploited labouring classes) know no hierarchies, indiscriminately biting and infecting the rich with the blood of the poor. Kingsley recasts the scene in *Past and Present* (1843) where Carlyle makes this point through an anecdote about the Irish widow who infects her unsympathetic neighbours with typhus. Disease functions as the ironic 'proof that she *was* flesh of your flesh', bone of your bone'.[36] Epidemic pollution reveals ecological truths. Their strategic deployment of miasmic language suggests that Victorians were so eco-conscious as to be aware of interchanges induced by pollution, even without accurate knowledge of germ theory. Writing these networks into the novel awakened perception of inescapable linkages between classes, exposing the reality that dirt, often understood as a working-class problem, affected every person in England.

Locke collapses into a feverish dream state after inhaling the poisonous gases of the cellar.[37] In an allegorical saga, ghosts of an ecological past haunt Locke: he dreams he has de-evolved into a madrepore, and then evolves over

[34] Typhus was most often spread by lice; often confused with typhoid fever, the two illnesses were not distinguished until 1869.

[35] Alan Rauch, 'The Tailor Transformed: Kingsley's *Alton Locke* And The Notion Of Change', *Studies In The Novel* 25.2 (1993), pp. 196–213 (p. 200).

[36] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), p. 129, p. 128.

[37] He may also have contracted typhus.

time back into a human.[38] Locke's evolution is triggered through altruism; it is when he protects his cousin from a falling tree, sacrificing his own life, that Locke evolves into an ape, the first stage of development towards humanity. During this stage, 'Each man coveted the universe for his own lusts, and not that he might fulfil in it God's command to people and subdue it' (p. 349). Subdue in this context means cultivate, referring back to an earlier allusion in the novel to Bacon's golden rule, 'Nature is conquered by obeying her' (p. 370). The universe must not be divided into resources for individual use: everyone must cooperatively share the land. Locke can only wake when he teaches his companions the proper relationship to the earth. He brings back to the present a past model of England and the "commons", free use of public land. His imagined evolution, an allegory of progress, resuscitates part of England's heritage. Locke, however, sets sail for America, where he hopes he may start a new life, and dies shortly upon reaching its shore. While Locke's autobiography lives on to inculcate the need for brotherhood, it offers an ambivalent conclusion. It is up to the reader to act.

'Kingsley Fever': Reforming Dirt

In *Sartor Resartus* (1836), Carlyle asks, 'What too are all Poets and Moral Teachers, but a Species of Metaphorical Tailors?'[39] Kingsley weaves a panoramic view of England: urban sweatshops and rural hovels tenanted by the lower classes, and the luxurious country estates and opulent drawing rooms of the elite. Miasma – inescapable – reveals currents of exchange; the workers are exploited by masters, who become infected by the hazardous conditions they create. Tina Choi argues that in urban fiction of the 1840s and 1850s, these intimate relationships between the biological and social create the connective tissue of the city, citing an 1843 *Quarterly Review* article: 'we reflect that the air

[38] A madrepore is a kind of stony coral. Darwin's first monograph, *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*, based on his investigations aboard the *Beagle* from 1832–1836, expounds his theory of the formation of coral reefs. Published in 1842, the monograph cemented Darwin's celebrity in scientific circles and earned him, in 1853, the Royal Society's Royal Medal. Given the Victorian mania for natural history, it is possible that the genus madrepore would be recognisable to Kingsley's contemporary readers.

[39] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*. ed. by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 219.

the labouring classes breathe [...] is the fluid in which rich and poor are equally immersed—that it is a commonwealth in which all are born, live, and die equal'.[40] The feared miasma communicates these lessons, wafting the message from the core of London, from the gases sublimated by human activity, across the nation. Kingsley's miasmic portrayal of dirt serves its purpose: the shock value in *Alton Locke* and *Yeast* forcefully awakens perception, playing on cultural anxiety to disseminate unforgettable truths. To return to the yeast metaphor, Kingsley clearly sought out a mass response to his ideas. If solutions depend principally on his reader, we may assume he did not simply mean individual action, but individuals as part of a collective acting cooperatively. As a proponent of sanitation reform, we may also assume Kingsley approved of government-helmed and centralised responses to public health issues.[41] Though he soundly condemns the Poor Law, via Tregarva, he suggests that better national education and equal economic opportunities are necessary to improve social conditions, both of which require collaborative action.[42]

Kingsley wrote for England's youth, who, inspired by his zeal and radical ideas, caught what Henry James dubbed 'Kingsley fever'.[43] This phrase captures Kingsley's hopes that his reforming fervour would be contagious. Significantly, both Smith and Locke become authors, and like their creator,

[40] Tina Young Choi, 'Writing the Victorian City: Discourses Of Risk, Connection, And Inevitability', *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Social, Political, And Cultural Studies* 43.4 (2001), pp. 561–89 (p. 569).

[41] As assumption confirmed in *Two Years Ago*, which features Tom Thurnall's exhaustive efforts on behalf of the Board of Health.

[42] Most biographies of Kingsley chronicle his increasing conservatism and his rejection of Chartism or political reform that would lead to democracy, as well as ambivalence towards state intervention; rather, he proposed 'self-help' and 'self-improvement'. See Norman, p. 38, p. 45; Klaver pp. 454-7. However, Norman and Klaver also suggest that if Kingsley's radicalism waned as he grew older, it was because he believed that significant progress had been achieved, and Kingsley's novels surely contributed to that. Uffelman describes Kingsley's social attitudes as more 'paternalistic' than truly 'egalitarian' (p. 56). His ethical, if not political agenda, nevertheless propagates ecological truths that insist upon the equal right of all people to a healthy environment, and, furthermore, the right of the nonhuman environment to be healthy.

[43] Endeavouring to instil his views in an even younger age group, Kingsley revisits these issues in his didactic children's story, *The Water-Babies* (1863). A young chimney sweep, Tom, becomes so fascinated with clean water that he drowns in the attempt to wash off the soot covering his body. This not only alludes to the lack of 'water up the court where he lived', but the city's smoky air. Kingsley's toxic discourse insists that Tom cannot survive in a contaminated environment, and so is transformed into a 'water-baby'. Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*. Ed. Richard D. Beards (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 1.

they use literature as the carrier of ideas that by spreading and multiplying may lead to environmental justice.

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