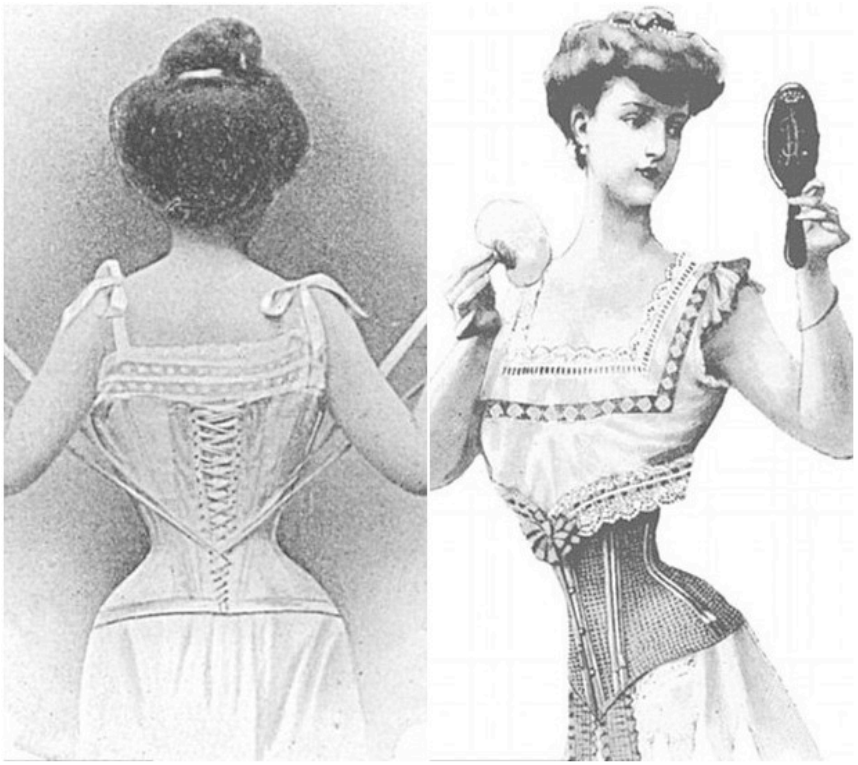


Victorian Network

Volume 6, Number 1
Summer 2015

Victorian Bodies and Body Parts

Volume 6, Number 1
Summer 2015

www.victoriannetwork.org

Victorian Network is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and supported by King's College London.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE BODY

Pamela K. Gilbert, Albert Brick Professor of English
(University of Florida)

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

> Gender is always a doing[.]
>
> Judith Butler

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bibliography

Adams, James Eli, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995)

Armstrong, Nancy, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999)

Foucault, Michel, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, [1971] 1991)

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

Miller, D. A., *The novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976)

Poovey, Mary, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Sussman, Herbert L., *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Weeks, Jeffrey, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981)

BIOPOWER: BODIES, MINDS AND BIOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTION IN VICTORIAN LIVES OF THE POETS

James Whitehead
(Liverpool John Moores University)

Abstract
This article discusses the diagnostic and exhibitionary character of nineteenth-century biographical discourse, with particular attention to Percy Bysshe Shelley. The article proposes that suggestive parallels between the life of the individual body and the textual materials of the written *Life* were often made in the nineteenth century. These parallels can be related to Foucauldian arguments about pastoral power and the individual subject, medicine and the case history, irrationality and juvenescence. The article argues that poetic subjects discussed as eccentric or pathological 'genius' were the ideal subjects and exemplify the proliferation and operation of forms of 'biopower'. With these arguments in mind, the article analyses biographical writing about Shelley up to 1860. Specifically, the article discusses how Shelley's biography moved from the somatic diagnosis of the poet's 'constitution consumptive' in sketches by William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, to taking his thoughts, behaviour and writing as symptomatic of psychosomatic pathology. Looking in particular at the biographical productions of Thomas Jefferson Hogg and Thomas Medwin, the article suggests how 'biopower' compensated for the absence of the diagnosable body by concentrating on and disciplining the embodied mind, in line with nineteenth-century "moral management", "domestic psychiatry", and the construction of "the mind of the child". Finally, the article considers Victorian biography's rhetoric of rational disenchantment and disillusionment, and suggests that it was conversely highly significant in establishing a version of beautifully and ineffectually irrational Romantic poetry. Looking forward to later periods, the article also proposes a pre-history of psychoanalytic or psycho-biographical criticism, and its 'hermeneutics of suspicion', in nineteenth- century biography.

'The structure of biography is biology', Terry Eagleton has written in a frequently quoted remark; 'even the most wayward of geniuses have to get themselves born and educated, fight with their parents, fall in love and die'.[1] This 'structural' parallel had a historical moment of formation and development across the nineteenth century. The turn of the century saw the disciplinary naming, and swift adoption, of *biology* and its cognates in European languages (1799 in English, 1802 in French and German), alongside the contemporary coining of various new terms for the written life, such as *autobiography* (1797). Although *biography* is an older word, it was only at this moment that its meaning broadened semantically to include 'the events or circumstances of a person's life, viewed collectively [. . .] the course of an individual human life, or the life cycle of an animal or plant.' (The *OED* dates this sense to

[1] 'First-Class Fellow Traveller', *London Review of Books*, 2 December 1993, p. 12.

1806.) [2] Two very different disciplines of 'life-writing' taking βίος as their common object were named, if not born, together. Over a century in which ontogeny, or individual history, was often thought to recapitulate phylogeny, or the natural history of the species, a parallel between the embodied natural history of an individual and the material of their written life was felt increasingly strongly.

For some Victorian thinkers, written biographies, in addition to forming the basis of a Carlylean heroic national pantheon, were entangled with the taxonomy of life history as natural history, a science both of the individual and of race or culture. For the educationalist Edwin Paxton Hood, writing in 1852, 'Biography forms the Museum of Life. Well-written lives are as well-preserved mental fossils, and they subserve for us the purpose of a collection of interesting petrefactions; they illustrate the science of life; they are the inductions of moral anatomy'.[3] This sort of rhetoric will inevitably remind contemporary readers of Foucauldian accounts of the 'history of the body', and the ways in which the 'moral anatomy' of scientific or pseudoscientific discourse constitutes human bodies in terms of panoptical power, visual exhibition, and normative ideology. Indeed, Hood's extended metaphor is perhaps best understood within the late-Foucauldian interpretation of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century biography expounded by William Epstein.[4] Epstein discusses biography as a locus for what Foucault had identified as the Enlightenment secularization of 'pastoral' power; that is, the observational, disciplinary power of society over the individual, previously largely expressed through religious offices such as confession, power which is 'coextensive and continuous with life', 'linked [at every point] with a production of truth—the truth of the individual.'[5] Foucault saw life-narratives as extending the power which determined life-meaning, power which 'does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during his entire life [which] cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets'.[6] The biography would seem to be the ideal vehicle for this variant of the panoptical vision and its 'moral anatomy'. As Foucault wrote, 'to

[2] *OED* s.vv. The neologism *biology* is often credited to Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, although it was used earlier in English by Thomas Beddoes. Another suggestive overlap in the lexicon is that *biology* is an early, rare synonym for *biography* in its primary sense (the written life).

[3] Edwin Paxton Hood, *The Uses of Biography: Romantic, Philosophic, and Didactic* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852), pp. 11–12.

[4] William H. Epstein, *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987). See also David Amigoni, *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (London: Harvester, 1993) for an account of the later period in similar terms.

[5] William H. Epstein, 'The Subject and Power' (1976), in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Paul Rabinow & Hubert L. Dreyfus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 213–215.

[6] *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 252.

reconstitute all the sordid detail of a life in the form of knowledge, [is] to fill in the gaps of that knowledge and to act upon it by a practice of compulsion'.[7] Epstein discusses examples such as Boswell's *Johnson* and also Johnson's *Life of Richard Savage* as points in the growth of structures of narrative power over the (largely literary) life, which he calls 'biographical subjection'.[8]

There is a further parallel to be drawn between several historical conjunctions at the beginning of the Victorian age. First a 'movement toward clinical medicine [was] accompanied in 1820s medicine by both an ethical and scientific stress on the importance of studying patients and biological organisms [. . .] as individuals in their particularity.'[9] At the same time the textual form of individual bodies 'in their particularity', the medical case history, began to develop rapidly: as Kathryn Montgomery Hunter has argued, 'the scientific medical case history [was] "invented" in the 1830s, when the early advances of human biology were beginning to enable the scientific physician to identify disease and accurately describe its workings in the body'.[10] Finally, in the 1820s and 1830s popular print culture had begun to disseminate an increasingly fraught and significant account of heightened individuality in the idea of literary celebrity or creative 'genius'. David Higgins has suggested that a massive increase of biographical material and habits of biographical reading took place in the periodical culture of these decades: 'an emphasis [...] placed on the individual consciousness behind aesthetic creation [...] contributed to an explosion of literary biography in the 1820s and 1830s'; 'literary magazines were feeding the demand for information about the private lives of authors and other public figures with a variety of memoirs, literary portraits, *ad hominem* reviews, conversations, reminiscences, and recollections'.[11] Reviews of books became longer and more loaded with biographical data, passing into a genre of short biography, amenable to publication in magazines, but also rather like the case history.

---

[7] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 151.

[8] *Recognizing Biography*, p. 54.

[9] Louise Penner, 'Medicine of the 1820s', *Literature Compass*, 1 (2004), pp.1–5 (p. 2).

[10] *Doctors' Stories: the Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 170; see also Stanley J. Reiser, 'Creating Form out of Mass: The Development of the Medical Record', in *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences* ed. by Everett Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 303–316 (p. 304).

[11] '*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the Construction of Wordsworth's Genius', in *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture,* ed. by Kim Wheatley (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 122-136 (p. 123); *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 60; esp. chapter 3, 'Magazine Biography in the Late Romantic Period', pp. 60–90, on 'the emergence of a new sub-genre that straddles the genres of biography and criticism—the literary portrait' (p. 61) in the 1820s. Annette Wheeler Cafarelli's *Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) also stresses the importance of the 'fragmentary, allusive, iconographic' short life in the period (p. 2).

It can be difficult to find obvious examples, outside of comments such as Hood's, where nineteenth century literary biographies were openly 'scientific' in their orientation, at least before the advent of degeneration and a flush of pathological readings of artists, especially concentrating on the infirmities of 'poetic genius', at the *fin de siècle*. If the medical case history became an explicit model for literary or historical biography, it was not until after the *fin de siècle* that this trend peaked.[12] The positivistic side of biography earlier in the century should also not be overplayed by giving undue prominence to works such as James Stanfield's *Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* (1813), with its serried ranks of comparative biographical tables and supposedly scientific method. This is a favourite example for historians of life-writing, but its contemporary reputation was slight and it was in many respects an outlier.[13] But even when biography is not explicitly linked to natural science or medicine, its power over what Foucault calls 'biodata' is constituted in similar terms; both are discourses which lay claim to the facts and meaning of the body and βίος in its 'natural' order. Biographical practice and discourse (at least in their popular forms) compel linear or ordered explanation more generally; so again, even when it is not explicitly scientific in its attitude or somatic in its emphasis, biography is part of a general discourse of *organisation* about the irrational, ineffable, or stubbornly material parts of life. And here, as Foucault wrote of the clinical gaze, or the moral management of the insane, 'a moral perception [. . .] would secretly serve as a nucleus for all the concepts that the nineteenth century would subsequently vindicate as scientific, positive, and experimental'.[14]

In the nineteenth century, the growth of biographies about the obscure, neglected, or pathological genius can be seen as the operation of the moral ordering of 'biopower' over its 'ideal' subjects: the morally *derangé*.[15] 'Wayward genius' was

[12] The earliest examples of historical biographies being written as explicit case histories are found in the first decades of the twentieth century: see Judson Bennett Gilbert and Gordon E. Mestler, *Disease and Destiny: a Bibliography of Medical References to the Famous* (London: Dawsons, 1962). A fascinating section of the Wellcome library (shelfmark BZPX) brings together many such biographies, which have a notable preoccupation with royalty in earlier works and political leaders in more contemporary writing, and combine differing levels of anxiety and curiosity towards figures of power and their bodily infirmities. The 'great man' in history had a corollary shadow-self in this tradition of feet of clay and 'mere mortals', the title of a series of 'medico-historical' lives published by Jonathan Cape in the 1920s.

[13] Jane Darcy makes this point effectively in 'Contesting Literary Biography in the Romantic Period', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008), pp. 1–18 (p. 5).

[14] *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Routledge Classics [2001], 2005), p. 187.

[15] From recent critical work, my sense of this trend draws partly on Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), which addresses the popularity of 'hidden lives' in the nineteenth century, and James Gregory's account of 'Eccentric Biography and the Victorians', *Biography,* 3 (2007), pp. 342–376; from older work, see also Joseph Reed's

not the outlying test for the rule but at its centre. To some extent this has been suggested by existing critical work. Jennifer Wallace has discussed the images of Keats's body sustained by the biographical tradition which followed his premature death.[16] But while she uses a generally Foucauldian frame of reference for 'the social and political construction of the body', and discusses the way that 'myths about Keats's body' encoded contemporary political reaction and gendered ideology, this is viewed as particular to Keats rather than something that nineteenth-century biographical writing did more widely, or did by virtue of being biographical.

As I have suggested, the embodied life of the subject and the material of the written *Life* have often been linked, especially in the age of 'lives and letters' when the 'privy papers' which made up large proportion of many Victorian *Lives* were often felt to be an extension of the person, and practices of literary celebrity and memorialisation closely linked to biography 'became increasingly focused on collecting [. . .] personal effects', such as locks of hair or other reliquary objects.[17] These practices naturally suggest a set of complicated and ambivalent desires. One needs only to think of Henry James's celebrated story of skulduggery in Romantic literary biography, *The Aspern Papers* (1888), with its biographical 'publishing scoundrel' 'looking for materials' and admitting 'a kind of ferocity' in his 'desire to possess them.' The 'materials' of desire for the narrator include not only the letters that would allow communion with the long-dead Shelleyan poet, but also the bodies touched by his vanished presence: 'The old lady's voice was very thin and weak, but [...] there was wonder in the thought that that individual note had been in Jeffrey Aspern's ear [...] I felt an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a moment the hand that Jeffrey Aspern had pressed'.[18] In the story, however, the 'desire to possess' is frustrated, to the narrator's 'almost intolerable' chagrin. The body of the biographical subject will always be absent; and the affective and power relations that biographies inaugurate over their subjects or 'materials' have consequently found egress through

sense of the 'wave of biographical works devoted to the notably obscure', in his *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 23. A. O. J. Cockshut, *Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Collins, 1974), and Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Knopf, 1965), the most enduringly useful survey of (mostly) Victorian biography, make similar observations.

[16] Jennifer Wallace, 'Keats's Frailty: The Body and Biography', in *Romantic Biography*, ed. by Alan Rawes and Arthur Bradley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 139–151 (p. 140). Wallace begins her article with the same quote from Terry Eagleton that I have used, but does not break it down in the same way, focusing instead on contemporary biological essentialism.

[17] Alexis Easley, *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship, 1850–1914* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 42. Easley notes that by the end of the century literary-biographical relic collection had become the subject of satire: see Harold Macfarlane, 'The Value of a Dead Celebrity', *Cornhill Magazine*, n.s. 8 (March 1900), pp. 367–371.

[18] Henry James, *The Aspern Papers* (New York: Macmillan, 1888), pp. 112, 65, 23.

other channels. I would like to suggest that the principal way that this happens in the nineteenth century is through intense attention to the embodied *mind* of the biographical subject. That is to say, unlike the clinical gaze, the biographical gaze never has a somatic object squarely in front of it. But it can and does take textual objects or reported speech to be embodiments of a state of mind, and hence to have symptomatic power. The 'universal trust in documents' in nineteenth century biography gave the genre great evidentiary power.[19] Pathological thought in particular (in a period when psychopathology was persistently somaticised) gave this power something to work with and on.

Among writers and artists in general, modern poets in particular have come to expect a posthumous biographical dissection using what Philip Larkin once referred to, in gloomy (and prescient) anticipation of its coming indignities, as 'that crummy textbook stuff from Freshman Psych'.[20] 'Psychobiography' has occupied a specific niche somewhere between psychology and literature, and various more or less psychoanalytic models have been proposed or practised.[21] Moreover, even when a specifically psychoanalytic framework is not used, as Anthony Storr has observed, 'many ideas and concepts originally derived from psychoanalysis have become so incorporated into intellectual discourse that biographers automatically employ them without realizing whence they came'.[22] The main tide of psychobiography followed the rise of Freud, naturally, partly through his own retrospective analyses of the lives of artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, and was swelled though the influence of Erik Erikson and others.[23] But an alignment of the biographer with the psychiatrist can still be seen in the wake of Freud, and now fading assumptions about drives and ego. In Diane Middlebrook's 1991 life of the poet Anne Sexton, not only are the attitudes and vocabulary of psychoanalysis used, but also the techniques and materials of the psychiatrist's working process; transcripts of audio tapes of analysis sessions were incorporated wholesale into the biography. Middlebrook later wrote:

---

[19] Cockshut, *Truth to Life*, p. 16.

[20] 'Posterity', in *Collected Poems* (London: Marvell Press/Faber, 1990), p. 170.

[21] See William Runyan, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Alan Elms, *Uncovering Lives: the Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); *Handbook of Psychobiography*, ed. by William Todd Schultz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[22] Anthony Storr, 'Psychiatry and Literary Biography', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. by John Batchelor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 73–86 (p. 73). See also Richard Ellmann, 'Freud and Literary Biography', in *Freud and the Humanities*, ed. by Peregrine Hordern (London: Duckworth, 1985), pp. 58–74.

[23] Donna Arzt, 'Psychohistory and Its Discontents', *Biography*, 1 (1978), pp. 1–36 surveys the major Freudian and Eriksonian biographies. See also Louise E. Hoffman, 'Early Psychobiography, 1900–1930: Some Reconsiderations', *Biography*, 7 (1984), pp. 341–352.

> [T]he tapes provided far more than information; they provided intimacy. The scepticism I had brought [. . .] vanished as, her captive, I struggled to grasp both the manifest and the latent meanings in what she confided to her doctor, and unwittingly, to me. Such intimacy is never without costs. Invaded by Sexton's voice, I was also invaded by her pain and despair—and by the rage she cunningly triggered in her search for punishment. My respect for her psychiatrist intensified as I sat invisibly between the two of them, witnessing the resourcefulness of her pathology.[24]

Here the biographer not only signals her 'respect' towards the psychiatrist, but also aligns herself with the clinician as panoptical, 'invisible' authority on Sexton's 'unwittingly' 'latent meanings': the poet is reified as 'her pathology'.[25] Yet Middlebrook also disavows clinical detachment by placing the writing of biography in the realm of emotional heroism, dangerous but productive intimacy, and shared pain and struggle. Finally, she suggests that the power relations of biographical subjection, captivation, or possession are reversible. Nevertheless, the 'resourcefulness' of the mind clearly offers a more satisfying possession than that allowed to the biographical inheritors of Jeffrey Aspern.

This apparently contemporary confusion of modes pervades those Victorian biographies which likewise addressed the minds of wayward 'poetic genius': on the one hand, they attempted to stress the biographer's disciplinary authority, or else identified with an objective or analytical praxis drawn from medicine, psychology, or elsewhere; on the other, they made sensational or sentimental appeals to a value-laden idea of genius transcending material circumstances or rational analysis, to personal and emotional ties to the subject, and to the personal task of redeeming a damaged reputation or correcting popular misrepresentations. I would like to propose that we can trace the prehistory of psychobiography in this blend of pathological diagnosis and biographical sympathy. We might also add one more strand to the complex genealogy of psychoanalytic thinking in the nineteenth century. This claim concerns not so much psychoanalytic ideas as a general attitude: the constitution of the creative mind as an object of analytical exegesis. This formation has had effects not only for avowedly psychoanalytic readers, but also for the half-examined ways that modern readers assume access to the mind of the author and historical *mentalités* in our biographical reading and interpretative habits generally: Victorian biography pioneered the hermeneutics of suspicion.

The second half of this article presents some specific examples for these broad claims from early Victorian biographical writing about Percy Bysshe Shelley,

[24] *The Literary Biography*, ed. by Dale Salwak (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 86–90; p. 89.

[25] 'Manifest and latent meanings' is a perfect example of the automatic employment of popular Freudian terms; probably the less said about the 'search for punishment' the better.

although similar trends could be charted in the biographical afterlives of John Clare, Blake, Chatterton, and other emblematic Romantic *enfants du siècle*.[26] There has been a fine tradition of scholarly work on Shelley's biographical afterlife.[27] In particular the political 'declawing' of Shelley via late-Victorian biography has also been addressed, although this 'emasculation' has also been complicated by Julian North's recent account of a Romanticism already entangled in the assumed femininity or domesticity of its biography.[28] The following discussion does not seek to include all the complexities of the biographical response to Shelley, especially this political whitewash, although 'irrational Shelley' did play a part in this. Nor does it even seek to list all instances where his image as 'mad poet' is returned to through the century: Engelberg has already done something of this nature.[29] His conclusion is that 'biographical evidence of Shelley's mental instability provided ['moralistic' and 'apologetic'] critics with a common framework for their discussions'.

Madness elided oppositions of sympathy: initial hostility and moralism were increasingly

> voiced in a context which significantly curtailed the extreme conclusions to which they had led in discussions during the first decade after Shelley's death. By 1860 most critics saw him as a nervous, sensitive man who had committed a number of errors as a man and as a poet. This view allowed them to pardon some of his outrageous opinions and actions and to praise the poems which they found most successful. It allowed for a considerable variety of

[26] See for example Deborah Dorfman's discussion of the biographical handling of Blake's 'insanity' in her *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), which despite its title offers coverage of the situation before and through Gilchrist, in chapters 1–2; especially pp. 16–19; 40–49; 72–78.

[27] See in particular Sylva Norman's quixotic *Flight of the Skylark: the Development of Shelley's Reputation* (London: Reinhardt, 1954); and the more laborious survey offered by Karsten Klejs Engelberg's *The Making of the Shelley Myth: an Annotated Bibliography of Criticism of Percy Bysshe Shelley 1822–1860* (London: Mansell, 1988), pp. 1–108. (Oddly Engelberg nowhere mentions Norman.) Both of these writers are concerned with the turn in sympathies that made Shelley's reputation the object of a rescue mission as the nineteenth century progressed; a transition from 'disrepute to popularity' (Norman) or a shift from 'moralistic' to 'apologetic' readers (Engelberg). See also Miriam Allott, 'Attitudes to Shelley: The Vagaries of a Critical Reputation', in *Essays on Shelley*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 1–38.

[28] Mark Kipperman, 'Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889–1903', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47 (1992), pp. 187–211; Julian North, 'Biography and the Shelleys', in *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 101–146 (pp. 102–103).

[29] 'Shelley, the Mentally Deranged Poet', in *The Making of the Shelley Myth*, pp. 44–60.

> interpretation, but it also prevented critics from discussing the intellectual aspects of Shelley's poetic vision.[30]

Engelberg is right in that an ambivalent reappraisal followed the early hostility of reviewers towards Shelley's poetry as contagious revolutionary disorder, and remade its great fall into dangerous insanity into alluring miniatures of flight from reason and reality. But he does not fundamentally question (in fact tacitly accepts) the 'biographical evidence' of Shelley's 'overwrought imagination', or the diagnostic claims of the *Lives*. Neither has any other critic of Shelley's reputation drawn out the thematic and rhetorical continuities between the major biographical texts' constructions of the poet's 'mad' image, or placed them in terms of the types of argument made above. One only has to look at later biographies, even the most scholarly, to see the importance and persistence of the ultimately unverifiable stories, images, or interpretations suggested here.[31] An examination of the 'evidence' of Shelley's eccentricities, as presented by Medwin, Hogg, Peacock, and others, shows that what is common to these accounts is less a consensus, and more a shared rhetoric of biography's diagnostic and corrective power over the passive, pliant, and correctable image of the poet that it forms. This was to have lasting consequences for Shelley's reputation.

William Hazlitt's magazine sketch of 1821 established the core of early biographical representations of Shelley. Hazlitt presents a diagnostic account of the poet using a strong rhetorical claim to empirical observation and deduction of symptoms from visual and aural sensory evidence. With a 'fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech', Shelley is violently 'sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced'; this supports Hazlitt's prognosis that 'as is often the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional *stamina*, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit.'[32] (Shelley's strident atheism is mischievously allied with the fixed ideas of the religious melancholic.) But already a half-step has been taken away from a mode of presentation squarely focused on the body; here the psychosomatic nervous body of genius, its spirit-flesh, is the ambiguous substrate of Hazlitt's sketch. His emphasis on Shelley's pathological lightness, his freedom from earthly 'ballast', is noteworthy, and foreshadows later images of Shelley's unworldly mental 'flight' from his body, later staged first

---

[30] *The Making of the Shelley Myth*, p. 60.

[31] As John Mullan has noticed, even the most skeptical and cautious of modern Shelley biographers, Newman Ivey White, still relies so heavily on perhaps the most factually wayward and 'most careless of biographers', Thomas Medwin, 'the naughty Captain' (Sylva Norman), that his index admits it has too many debts to Medwin to fully record.

[32] William Hazlitt, 'On Paradox and Commonplace', in *Table Talk; or, Original Essays* (London: John Warren, 1821), pp. 347–372 (p. 355).

negatively as delusional insanity, then positively as spiritual distance from the sublunary:

> There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out, threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind [...] Bubbles are to him the only realities:—touch them, and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling.[33]

The most immediately fruitful seed of future influence in this passage, however, was Hazlitt's verdict on Shelley as a 'child in feeling.' As Julian North notes, drawing from Mary Shelley's account of Percy:

> The representation of Shelley as immature [...] was often repeated by other biographers. It was one, influential, manifestation of the more widespread Victorian construction of the Romantic poet and the Romantic age as perpetually youthful: a way of reconciling readers to controversial political, social, sexual, and religious views by consigning them to the past.[34]

This stress is particularly apparent in the case of Shelley: for Medwin the 'Eternal Child', for Hogg the 'child of genius' and the 'youthful dreamer', and likewise in his other early *Lives*.[35] For Hogg, especially, the point about disguising radical youth is well taken. In relation to nineteenth-century biography more widely, as discussed above, a sense of the biographical 'minor' as a fit subject for the pastoral power which life-writing exerts, or for the scientific taxonomy of an organically-imagined progression of national life from childhood to maturity (ontogeny reflecting phylogeny) are yet more resonant. But it cannot be so for the almost contemporary Hazlitt; nor indeed for Thomas Love Peacock, who pre-empted all biographical writing on Shelley as marvellous boy with his distinctly adolescent 'Scythrop Glowry', a thinly veiled portrayal of the poet, in his coterie satire *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). The Romantic poet as biographical minor also came from ideas about mental vagary. An association between childhood and madness was particularly strong in the period: for Foucault, especially, the madman under moral management became a

---

33 'On Paradox and Commonplace', p. 356

34 *The Domestication of Genius*, p. 133.

35 Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. by H. Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 332; Thomas Jefferson Hogg *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858) I, p. 212; II, p. 118. Medwin took this phrase from an 1845 piece by Thomas De Quincey, who notes in turn that he has borrowed it from George Gilfillan's 'Gallery' in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*: see De Quincey's *Sketches Critical and Biographic* (Edinburgh: James Hogg & Sons, 1857), pp. 1–29, p. 28n.

refractory child, and madness the 'minority status' of childhood, 'organized so that the insane are transformed into minors. They are regarded as children who have an overabundance of strength and make dangerous use of it'.[36] It was not only that Shelley was a child, but 'an overgrown child with the power of a man' (Hazlitt).

Biography also became a form of moral management, an arena in which the irrational man-child was confronted with his own delusions. Unreason was summoned drawn up to be diminished or dismissed, yet constantly played on. For Shelley, the principal practitioner in this mode was Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Immediately following Shelley's death, the embargo on biographical writing maintained by Sir Timothy Shelley had been almost total. But biography began to creep in regardless, with Thomas Medwin's clumsy and error-strewn footnote to his widely-criticised *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron* (1824). Medwin gave an account of Shelley the child at Eton, his 'character of great eccentricity' in childhood standing in for the whole 'wild and visionary' life of the man.[37] This partly reflected the moralistic hostility of early reviewers; but Shelley's ally Leigh Hunt, in a similar publication, also provided a picture of an unhealthy poet doomed not to 'have lived many years' by 'constitution consumptive' (there is no evidence to support Hunt's conjecture).[38] But it was Hogg who made the first biographical move to cement 'eccentric Shelley', in the series of articles on 'Shelley at Oxford' published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1832–33.[39] This rapidly supplanted diagnoses of the absent and dubiously consumptive body of the poet with his eminently diagnosable mind. Hogg exhibited a 'remarkably youthful' poet at university, 'even [...] where all were very young':[40]

> It would be easy to fill many volumes with reminiscences characteristic of my young friend, and of these the most trifling would perhaps best illustrate his innumerable peculiarities. [...] A familiarity with the daily habits of Shelley and the knowledge of his demeanour in private will greatly facilitate [...] the full comprehension of his views and opinions. Traits that unfold an infantine simplicity, the genuine simplicity of true genius, will be slighted by those only who are ignorant of the qualities that constitute greatness of soul: the philosophical observer knows well

[36] *Madness and Civilization*, p. 252.

[37] Thomas Medwin, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron* (London: Henry Colburn: 1824), pp. 248–259.

[38] Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn: 1828), pp. 174–176.

[39] Also published by Henry Colburn, who cornered the market for Shelley anecdote early on.

[40] 'Shelley at Oxford', *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1832, pp. 91–96 (p. 91).

> that to have shown a mind to be original and perfectly natural, is no inconsiderable step in demonstrating that it is also great.[41]

The stress on 'innumerable peculiarities' (and Hogg later tried at least to fill several volumes with reminiscences of these) goes hand in hand with the construction of the 'philosophical' biographical reader, who is expected to align himself with Hogg's voice of moderation and reason within the scenes presented, appreciative yet corrective. Later, in his rather partial account of their expulsion from Oxford, Hogg blames the University, accusing it of a failure of moral management: it neglected the corrective attention and power that his biography provides, the 'right institution' that would 'have mitigated the rigorous austerity of his course of living, and [...] would have remitted the extreme tension of his soul by reconciling him to a liberal mirth, convincing him, that if life be not wholly a jest, there are at least many comic scenes occasionally interspersed in the great drama'.[42] This becomes his own task. Hogg's essentially comic account of Shelley's 'infantine simplicity'—the crestfallen return from the geology lecture on 'stones, stones, stones! Nothing but stones!', the rescuing of donkeys, the 'primeval chaos' of Shelley's room and his scorched scout, the Platonic interrogation of the baby with regard to its pre-existence on Magdalen Bridge—is familiar to readers of all later Shelley biography. These anecdotes proved to be ineradicable. But what is less often noticed is this serious purpose to which Hogg thought his *comédie des moeurs* could be put. Principally, Hogg repeatedly returns to the originality found in the ingenuous 'simplicity of true genius', despite his instinct to mock or to play the rational biographer set above the irrational poet, and within the frame of this primitivism takes Shelley's 'genius' seriously. But there is also a cautionary pseudo-medical prescription about 'ardent' over-study embedded in the farce. This is most apparent in the vivid anecdote where:

> On the evening of a wet day, when we had read with scarcely any intermission from an early hour in the morning, I have urged him to lay aside his book. It required some extravagance to rouse him to join heartily in conversation; to tempt him to avoid the chimney-piece, on which commonly he had laid the open volume. "If I were to read as long as you do, Shelley, my hair and my teeth would be strewed about on the floor, and my eyes would slip down my cheeks into my waistcoat pockets; or at least I should become so weary and nervous, that I should not know whether it were so or not." He began to scrape the carpet with his feet, as if teeth were actually lying upon it, and he looked fixedly at

41 'Shelley at Oxford II', *New Monthly Magazine*, February 1832, pp. 137–145 (p. 144).

42 Shelley at Oxford IV', *New Monthly Magazine*, July 1832, p. 67–73 (p. 73).

> my face, and his lively fancy represented the empty sockets; his imagination was excited.[43]

These were standard medical worries about educated, middle-class, youthful 'genius': J.-É.D. Esquirol's 'nombreux écarts de régime': not sleeping correctly, little physical exercise, reading too much, and above all, the excited imagination.[44] Hogg seems entirely to look past Shelley's own sense of humour.[45] Instead he becomes retrospectively a literal-minded watcher for those early symptoms which he *knew* would *end badly*. This is a slightly different aspect to the 'domestication of genius' suggested by Julian North. The Victorian readers of biography she describes wanted depoliticised and personalised authors; but there was also a strong clamour for cautionary tales of weakness and illness.[46] Exemplary lives could show where the health and inheritance of the bourgeois family could be imperiled. If only, like the university, Sir Timothy Shelley had seen and acted on the signs earlier, Hogg implies.

Biographical writing of this type sat alongside 'domestic psychiatry', where 'supervision of the child became supervision in the form of deciding on the normal and the abnormal; one began to keep an eye on the child's behaviour, character, and sexuality'.[47] Shelley's biographers are constantly assessing 'the child' against introduced standards of normality, where he is found wanting. The biographies also seek to criticise 'normal' morality, of course, but it is the repeated emphasis on the disjunction between the two that is significant. By 1858, Hogg's main trope for this rhetoric became food: it is by reference to his dietary habits that Shelley was shown to be unworldly, and perhaps admirable, but also sub-normal. Shelley's real dietary heterodoxy is well known.[48] But critical discussion often depends on the numerous examples that Hogg presents of Shelley's eating as embodied insane thinking, tangible delusion. The horror of butter he burlesques in a teacake-centred episode

---

[43] 'Shelley at Oxford IV', p. 70.

[44] Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Maladies Mentales* (Paris: Baillière, 1838), passim.

[45] Richard Holmes notes that other biographer-friends such as Peacock 'always understood this side of Shelley better than Hogg and [were] prepared to write about it more carefully.' Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 25.

[46] Memorably found in the sub-genre of Victorian biography devoted to, in the title of one volume, *Wrecked Lives; or Men Who Have Failed* (London: SPCK, 1880).

[47] Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973—1974*, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 124. See also Akihito Suzuki, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient and the Family in England 1820-60* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) for 'domestic psychiatry', and Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) on the development of mental science preoccupied by adolescent sexuality, precocity, and unhealthy imagination.

[48] See Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: the Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

when Shelley visits Southey at Keswick is typical.[49] It is presented in such an exaggerated way that it begins to read more like those cases in contemporary psychiatric writing where the bizarre hallucinations of the mad are deliberately framed in terms of domestic goods, which make them both more tangible to the general reader, and more *unheimlich*, in need of the expert common-sense of the alienist. Both John Conolly and George Man Burrows have cases of men thinking they are *made* of butter; the latter suggests that they should be gently guided away from the fire. Conolly discusses this as example of that 'insanity on this one subject, but only as regards the impression: the rest of his conduct is rational enough.' [50] Diet, for Hogg, was Shelley's monomania. By contrast, Hogg sees himself moderate and sensible, but without illusions about his predilections to 'roast potatoes, chestnuts, and the like; to boil an egg, to make coffee, toast, and other good things'. Meanwhile Shelley, in Keswick, ends up hungrily devouring the supposedly wicked butter and teacakes, so the poet is granted his unworldly ideas, yet brought down to earth as greedily human after all. The episode of Shelley backsliding from his vegetarianism to cry 'So this is bacon! [...] Bring more bacon!' soon after has a similar dynamic, and Hogg conveys an even greater sense of spurious triumph at catching the poet out in his deluded notions.[51] The butter and the bacon, significantly, come shortly before perhaps the key passage of the biography, where Hogg describes Shelley as

> an elegant, beautiful, odoriferous parasitical plant; he could not support himself; he must be tied up fast to something of a firmer texture, harder and more rigid [...] some person of a less flexible formation: he always required a prop, [...] some ordinary every day person with whom he was familiar.[52]

While the reporting of the odd personal tastes or behaviour of artists was nothing new, this emphasis certainly is, as is the collusion of biography's writers and readers in the domestic 'everyday' to diagnose and correct irregularity. Hazlitt had also commented on Shelley's 'bending, flexible form', which 'appears to take no strong hold about him'.[53] But Hogg's image is more reminiscent of the picture of a bending sapling tied to a straight stake, taken from the frontispiece of Nicholas Andry's *Orthopædia: or, the art of correcting and preventing deformities in children* (1743)

[49] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II. pp. 31–34; cf. II, pp. 322–323.

[50] George Man Burrows, *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (London: Underwood, 1828), pp. 268–269; John Conolly, *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity* (London: Taylor, 1830), pp. 303–305.

[51] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, pp. 34–36.

[52] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, p. 30; II, p. 46.

[53] 'On Paradox and Commonplace', p. 355.

and deployed as an emblem of disciplinary power by Foucault (once again) in *Discipline and Punish.*

More could be said about Hogg's presentation of the 'mad Shelley' in the 1858 text of his biography. There is the constant presentation of letters as evidence of Shelley's 'wild' state of mind, often edited to make them more so, the height of Hogg's manipulation of the documentary record being his notorious use of the correspondence surrounding his break with Shelley to cook up the fragment of a Werther-esque novel.[54] Hogg, while criticising Shelley for his paranoia, takes him at face value when the claim is advanced that he had a narrow escape from confinement in a private madhouse while at school; equally, the biographer feels free to decide that some of the things Shelley described to him from his childhood must never have happened, and were therefore obviously delusions. He elides the poet with his poetry, describing poems on the subject of madness as themselves 'strange delusion', in the case of the Margaret Nicholson poems. Melancholy and humourless, stricken by 'poet's sadness', Hogg's Shelley is at the mercy of his wayward body as manifest through the transparently legible content of his wayward mind. Various 'hallucinations' are dwelt upon in repeated returns to a Shelley generally 'completely and universally under the influence of inspiration' or 'the absolute, despotical empire of a vivid, fervid fancy.'[55] But by 1858 much of Hogg's material in this domain, beyond that reprinted from 'Shelley at Oxford', came from biographical work by other hands, which had emerged in the meantime. To examine the episodes often cited in the period, and beyond, as incontrovertible biographical evidence of Shelley's madness (the incident at Tan-y-rallt, the vision of the woman with 'elephantiasis') we must take some account of these.

As Richard Cronin has observed of Hogg and other biographers of Shelley, one 'peculiarity' is that their 'admiration tends to soar to a height precisely corresponding to the depth of [their] contempt.'[56] Admiration was initially professed in the productions of Medwin, the childhood acquaintance who was to become a dreaded guest in Italy and a much worse nuisance to Mary Shelley long afterwards, ultimately (according to Mary) running nastily to blackmail. Like Hogg, Medwin initially provided sketches for the periodical press, partly in competition with Hogg. His 'Shelley Papers' ran in the *Athenaeum* in 1833 before he reused and reshaped the material for an exploitative and repetitive two-volume *Life* in 1847. As far as contempt goes, it has mostly been directed at Medwin himself: his standing has always been poor. Buxton-Forman's introduction to his edition of 1847 *Life* claims that it is scarcely possible to record each 'bungle' and 'theft', and memorably has him

[54] See Richard Cronin's fascinating account of Hogg's 'untrustworthiness', in his *Romantic Victorians: English Literature 1824–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 27–34.

[55] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, pp. 27–41; II, pp. 68–71; I, pp. 264–269; II, p. 114; II, pp. 344, 350.

[56] *Romantic Victorians*, p. 34.

as a 'shifty adventurer', 'more a sharper than an idiot'; Sylva Norman calls him a 'thick-skinned opportunist' and an 'arrant rascal' characterised by a 'ceaseless exertion to grope for gold down every alley that shows its gleam'.[57] Nevertheless Medwin was an important early mediator of Shelley's image. He also began with the psychosomatic body. His 1833 version of the poet has 'too much imagination', 'shattered', 'irritable nerves', and a weak body 'bent by study and ill health.' Shelley is presented in this account with much more sentimental gloss than in Hogg, however. Medwin sees 'a spirit of benevolence' over all Shelley wrote and 'a mind in which selfishness never entered', although qualifying criticisms often trail behind his parade of panegyrics ('the sincerity of his opinions, however erroneous'). The general portrait of 1833 concludes with the ominous judgement that 'insanity hung as by a hair suspended over the head of Shelley.'[58] This phrase, in contrast to Hazlitt's bodily diagnosis of Shelley's fever, expands and re-inscribes the poet's visionary (or delusional) characteristics in the reading of the scene. Medwin ends with a comparison of Shelley and Byron's 'madness'; Byron was more in control of his imagination, Medwin thought, but both men were 'unconscious' of the total extent of its hold over them and their literary output.[59] Medwin's 1847 *Life* needed to bring more to the table than old physiology or this vague speculation. Its author responded by producing a discussion of what he claimed to be evidence of Shelley's 'overheated imagination' and 'delusion', the 'attack' at Tan-y-rallt in 1813.[60] Again biography turned from diagnosing Shelley's absented body to diagnosing his abstracted mind.

In this incident, Shelley had claimed that an intruder had entered his rented house near Tremadoc in North Wales and shot at him in a sustained assassination attempt. For Medwin and for Hogg following him, it was obvious that the poet's imagination or hallucinations were responsible; there was no possibility that an attempt on Shelley's life might really have happened. Later biographers have been more cautious about a still very obscure incident, although their treatment of the Tan-y-rallt episode provides a useful test-case for Shelley's ongoing status as the object of psychobiography and its vicissitudes and shows the importance, or at least the persistence, of early biographical insinuations. Edward Dowden (1886) and Edmund Blunden (1946), intent on Shelley's canonical propriety, took his account more on trust, but then biographies by Newman Ivey White, Kenneth Neill Cameron, and Richard Holmes, with a sense of 'modern' psychology (i.e. psychoanalysis) reverted

[57] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1913), pp. ix, xi; *Flight of the Skylark*, pp. 173–175.

[58] *The Shelley Papers: Memoir of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Original Poems and Papers* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co., 1833), pp. 29, 58, 63, 104–5; pp. 93, 96–97; p. 101.

[59] *The Shelley Papers*, pp. 100–102.

[60] *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1913), pp. 116–117.

to viewing it to various degrees as delusional psychodrama.[61] The most recent major life, by James Bieri, asserts with confidence that it was one in a series of 'transient psychotic episodes with paranoid overtones', a 'panic attack with delusional and hallucinatory aspects' (Bieri is a psychologist).[62] This blanket of authoritative jargon does not address the fact that the only real new data in the twentieth century, the investigations of H. M. Dowling, highlight the fraught local political atmosphere and the distinct likelihood that the incident was real, but stage-managed, to scare Shelley off.[63] Richard Holmes has added that no early biographer realised the extent of Home Office spying on Shelley, nor his real subversive activity, and that 'their understanding of Shelley's political fears and commitments, and how serious they were, suffered in consequence'.[64] What really happened, in any event, is secondary to the alacrity Hogg and Medwin showed in ignoring suggestions (from figures such as William Madocks) of the attack's possible reality. As Holmes suggests, the early biographers found hallucinations too 'convenient to cover up those parts of his career which they did not know, did not approve of, or which they simply did not understand.'[65] So Medwin piled onto Shelley's image details of his own apparently substantial medical knowledge, referring authoritatively to somnambulism and 'severe erethism of the nerves.'[66] As the archaic medical terminology suggests (erethism is 'excitement of an organ or tissue in an unusual degree; also *transf.* morbid over-activity of the mental powers or passions', *OED*) this was a mode of presentation which rooted all imaginative or poetic behaviour in the nervous body and all its defective, twitching organs and tissues.

The medical presentation of Shelley's psychological symptoms is also found, somewhat surprisingly, in the biographical writings of Thomas Love Peacock. Drawn late and reluctantly onto the contested terrain of Shelleyana, Peacock published several instalments of his 'Memoirs' in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1858 onwards, beginning as a review of Hogg and Medwin. Peacock's ambivalence towards the existing biographies' combination of forensic pretensions and domestic confinement is evident in his opening remarks on 'the departed author' as 'a fair subject to be

[61] Newman Ivey White, *Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951), pp. 210–211; Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley: the Golden Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 90–95.

[62] James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: a Biography. Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 281, 289.

[63] H. M. Dowling, 'The Attack at Tanyrallt', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 12 (1961), pp. 28–36; H. M. Dowling, 'What happened at Tanyrallt?', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 2 (1955), pp. 540–542.

[64] *Shelley: the Pursuit*, p. 162n. There was also an outstanding debt of £400 to be avoided.

[65] *Shelley: the Pursuit*, p. 187.

[66] *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 27.

dissected at the tea table of the reading public.'[67] Peacock also discusses Tan-y-rallt, agreeing that it was 'imaginary', but moves quickly to say that 'the mental phenomena in which this sort of semi-delusion originated will better illustrated by one which occurred at a later period [. . .] more perseveringly adhered to'. This was Shelley's supposed fixed perception that he might catch elephantiasis, cured when he was directed by Peacock to a passage in Lucretius which claimed the disease was found only in Africa.[68] Peacock's judgement that these were 'semi-delusions', the imagination amplifying a 'basis in firm belief' and possible fact, is in one sense the 'characteristically English kind of compromise [. . .] an indefinite mixture of fact and fantasy' that Richard Holmes discerns in many later biographers' judgements on Shelley's psychology.[69] But it is also squarely characteristic of the moral treatment of the mad in the early nineteenth-century, and the various typologies of partial insanity discussed as wrong reasoning from right perception, in the model passed down from a famous passage in Locke's *Essay,* or from many other available concepts of *folie raisonnante*. Partial insanity also allowed the biographically amassed details 'of each individual in particular, during his entire life' to be opened to interpretation as incipient madness. Peacock's prescription, like those before him, was both domestic and corporeal ('three mutton chops well peppered') and moral management of Shelley-the-patient's fixed false perceptions and delusions: they 'severally vanished under the touch of investigation' which the rational biographer-friend provided. Peacock concludes that this disabusing would have been echoed on a much large scale had Shelley survived, his youthful inanities or insanities diminishing under the 'attainment of reality', and shrinking to the epitaph 'DÉSILLUSIONÉ'.[70] It could be a motto for writers and readers of Victorian biographies of Shelley.

There remained those, in shorter biographical articles of the 1840s and 1850s, who stuck with the earlier view of Shelley as a pathological body infected by revolutionary mania or delusion. Indeed, almost any subject Shelley took interest in, especially political or religious, became in the eyes of conservative memoirists his 'monomania', rooted in the perversity of his psycho-physical temperament.[71] With the publication of the official *Shelley Memorials: from Authentic Sources* in 1859, and the beginning of the later Victorian campaign of Shelley idealization, the tide of

[67] Thomas Love Peacock, 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Fraser's Magazine*, 57 (1858), pp. 643–659 (p. 643).

[68] 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley', pp. 654, 656.

[69] 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Part II', *Fraser's Magazine*, 61 (1860), pp. 92–109; p. 99 *Shelley: the Pursuit*, p. 187n.

[70] 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley' II, pp. 97; 99; 109.

[71] See for examples the anecdotes presented by John Dix, *Pen and Ink Sketches of Poets* (London: Bogue, 1846), p. 143; and J. G. Merle, 'A Newspaper Editor's Reminiscences', *Fraser's Magazine*, 23 (1841), pp. 699–710 (p. 704).

apologetics, but also of disembodiment, began to turn more decisively. Here Shelley was referred to vaguely in terms of 'the eccentricities of a wild but generous nature', but any further details were dismissed, along with criticism of Shelley's politics, morals, or elopements, as 'a fantastical caricature' (this referred mostly to Hogg, whose *Life* had given the younger Shelleys 'the most painful feelings of dismay.')[72] Edward Trelawny, the last of the major early biographers to have known Shelley, surely sensed this turn in his picture of Shelley as physically and mentally robust, all mention of 'madness' being shifted into a pure Platonic realm, part of the 'ideal of what a poet should be.'[73] Trelawny's *Recollections* (also 1858) and *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author* (1878) stayed remarkably consistent on this subject despite his (in John Mullan's wry phrase) 'remembering in ever greater detail as the years went by' various other areas of Shelley's life which Trelawney thought might be more worth embroidering.

In the background we can hear the beating of the wings of Matthew Arnold's 'beautiful and ineffectual angel' approaching. This was, however, an image which can also be seen as a legacy of an early biographical tradition which took Shelley to be 'an angel touched by lunacy', itself an abstraction and idealization of earlier critics who held Shelley to be a dangerous lunatic and his 'specimens of inspired composition' as 'derived from the white-washed walls of St. Luke's or Hoxton'.[74] The process of abstraction, I have tried to demonstrate here, tells us something about Shelley in particular, and something more about nineteenth-century biography and the uses to which it put its troublesome Romantic youth.

---

[72] *Shelley Memorials: from Authentic Sources*, ed. by Lady Jane Shelley (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859), pp. 8, viii.

[73] Edward Trewlany, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858); *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author* (London: Routledge, 1878). 'Ideal of what a poet should be' is from the preface to the latter (no page no.).

[74] Thomas De Quincey, *Sketches Critical and Biographic*, p. 6; *Literary Gazette* (9 September, 1820), in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: the Critical Heritage*, ed. by James E. Barcus (London: Routledge, 1995), no. 49, pp. 226–235 (p. 231). I discuss the rhetoric of insanity in periodical reviews of Romantic poets, and the way that this segued into biographical mythologization and the image of the mad poet across the century generally, in *Madness and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), chapters 4 and 5. This work also discusses the cases of William Blake and John Clare in a similar context to the arguments and examples advanced here, and the way that the 'the facts of biography' concerning these writers and others directly fed into medical and not so medical writings on degeneration and genius late in the century. In the case of Shelley, these included especially the supposed visions at the Casa Magni, and physiognomic readings of his 'small' head.

Bibliography

Allott, Miriam 'Attitudes to Shelley: The Vagaries of a Critical Reputation', in *Essays on Shelley*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 1–38

Altick, Richard D., *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Knopf, 1965)

Amigoni, David, *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (London: Harvester, 1993)

Arzt, Donna, 'Psychohistory and its Discontents', *Biography*, 1 (1978), pp. 1–36

Atkinson, Juliette, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Barcus, James E., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Bennett Gilbert, Judson, & Gordon E. Mestler, *Disease and Destiny: A Bibliography of Medical References to the Famous* (London: Dawsons, 1962)

Bieri, James, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004)

Burrows, George Man, *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (London: Underwood, 1828)

Cameron, Kenneth Neill, *Shelley: the Golden Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974)

Cockshut, A. O. J., *Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Collins, 1974)

Conolly, John, *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity* (London: John Taylor, 1830)

Cronin, Richard, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature 1824–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002)

Darcy, Jane, 'Contesting Literary Biography in the Romantic Period', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008), pp. 1–18

De Quincey, Thomas, *Sketches Critical and Biographic* (Edinburgh: James Hogg & Sons, 1857)

Dix, John *Pen and Ink Sketches of Poets* (London: Bogue, 1846)

Dorfman, Deborah, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969)

Dowling, H. M., 'The Attack at Tanyrallt', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 12 (1961), 28–36

Dowling, H. M., 'What happened at Tanyrallt?', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 2 (1955), pp. 540–542

Easley, Alexis, *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship, 1850–1914* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011)

Eagleton, Terry, 'First-Class Fellow Traveller', *London Review of Books*, 2 December 1993

Ellmann, Richard, 'Freud and Literary Biography', in *Freud and the Humanities*, ed. by Peregrine Hordern (London: Duckworth, 1985), pp. 58–74

Elms, Alan, *Uncovering Lives: the Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

Engelberg, Karsten Klejs, *The Making of the Shelley Myth: an Annotated Bibliography of Criticism of Percy Bysshe Shelley 1822–1860* (London: Mansell, 1988)

Epstein, William H., *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987)

Esquirol, Jean-Étienne Dominique, *Maladies Mentales* (Paris: Baillière, 1838)

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979)

Foucault, Michel, 'The Subject and Power', in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Paul Rabinow & Hubert L. Dreyfus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 213–215

Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Routledge Classics, 2005)

Foucault, Michel, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973—1974*, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Gregory, James, 'Eccentric Biography and the Victorians', *Biography,* 3 (2007), pp. 342–376

Hazlitt, William, 'On Paradox and Commonplace', in *Table Talk; or, Original Essays* (London: John Warren, 1821), pp. 347–372

Higgins, David, '*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the Construction of Wordsworth's Genius', in *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture,* ed. by Kim Wheatley (London: Cass, 2003), pp. 122-136

Higgins, David, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005)

Hoffman, Louise E., 'Early Psychobiography, 1900–1930: Some Reconsiderations', *Biography*, 7 (1984), pp. 341–352

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson, 'Shelley at Oxford', *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1832, pp. 91–96

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson, 'Shelley at Oxford II', *New Monthly Magazine*, February 1832, pp. 137–145

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson, 'Shelley at Oxford IV', *New Monthly Magazine*, July 1832, pp. 67–73

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858)

Holmes, Richard, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005)

Hunt, Leigh, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn: 1828)

Ivey White, Newman, *Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951)

James, Henry, *The Aspern Papers* (New York: Macmillan, 1888)

Kipperman, Mark, 'Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889–1903', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47 (1992), pp. 187–211

Larkin, Philip, *Collected Poems* (London: Marvell Press/Faber, 1990)

Love Peacock, Thomas, 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Fraser's Magazine*, 57 (1858), pp. 643–659

Love Peacock, Thomas, 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Part II', *Fraser's Magazine*, 61 (1860), pp. 92–109

Macfarlane, Harold 'The Value of a Dead Celebrity', *Cornhill Magazine*, n.s. 8 (March 1900), pp. 367–371

Medwin, Thomas, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron* (London: Henry Colburn: 1824)

Medwin, Thomas, *The Shelley Papers: Memoir of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, *and Original Poems and Papers* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1833)

Medwin, Thomas, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. by H. Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913)

Merle, J. G., 'A Newspaper Editor's Reminiscences', *Fraser's Magazine*, 23 (1841), pp. 699–710

Montgomery Hunter, Kathryn, *Doctors' Stories: the Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)

Morton, Timothy, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: the Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Mullan, John, ed., *Lives of the Great Romantics by their Contemporaries: Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999)

Norman, Sylva, *Flight of the Skylark: the Development of Shelley's Reputation* (London: Reinhardt, 1954)

North, Julian, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Paxton Hood, Edwin, *The Uses of Biography: Romantic, Philosophic, and Didactic* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852)

Penner, Louise, 'Medicine of the 1820s', *Literature Compass*, 1 (2004), pp. 1–5

Reed, Joseph, *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966)

Reiser, Stanley J., 'Creating Form out of Mass: The Development of the Medical Record', in *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences* ed. by Everett Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 303–316

Runyan, William, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)

Salwak, Dale, ed., *The Literary Biography* (London: Macmillan 1996)

Schultz, William Todd, ed., *Handbook of Psychobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Shelley, Lady Jane, ed., *Shelley Memorials: from Authentic Sources* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859)

Shuttleworth, Sally, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Storr, Anthony, 'Psychiatry and Literary Biography', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. by John Batchelor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 73–86

Suzuki, Akihito, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient and the Family in England 1820-60* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)

Trelawny, Edward John, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858)

Trelawny, Edward John, *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author* (London: Routledge, 1878)

Wallace, Jennifer, 'Keats's Frailty: The Body and Biography', in *Romantic Biography*, ed. by Alan Rawes & Arthur Bradley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 139–151

Wheeler Cafarelli, Annette, *Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990)

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 Ricouer'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 Grener, '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 visuality, 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 Louis 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 Matroyshka 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 Sangers' 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* (Ithica: 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.bsls.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 at 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 nears 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't 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* (Ithica: 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)

"THIS LITTLE ACTION": THE FEMININE MANNER OF TOUCHING IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *WIVES AND DAUGHTERS*

Molly Livingstone
(Georgia State University, Atlanta)

Abstract
A close look at scenes of physical intimacy between women in nineteenth-century novels reveals much about larger Victorian concerns with affection and sensibility, femininity, and identity. Given that nineteenth-century English society propagated the belief that a woman's nature suited her best for wife- and motherhood, and that certain "feminine" traits of affection and simplicity of heart were considered essential in the domestic woman, it was necessary that women who desired to marry show themselves to possess these characteristics. Using Judith Butler's performativity theory, which states that 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body,'[1] I contend here that one powerful vehicle for presenting a woman's femininity, and therefore desirability as a wife, was the deployment of female touch. More specifically, I argue that certain kinds of touch between close friends – specifically spontaneous, sincere and affectionate touch – signified for the Victorians a distinctly feminine identity, indicating the aptitude for sensuality and a loving, "womanly" heart. Conversely, touch between women that did not meet such standards could be read as suspicious or problematic. An examination of the female characters in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* clearly exemplifies the ability of touch to function in these ways.

In her final novel, Elizabeth Gaskell presents a seemingly simple scene of female amity between the novel's heroine, Molly Gibson, and her soon-to-be stepmother, Hyacinth Kirkpatrick. Gaskell writes:

> Molly and her future stepmother wandered about in the gardens with their arms round each other's waists, or hand in hand, like two babes in the wood; Mrs. Kirkpatrick active in such endearments, Molly passive, and feeling within herself very shy and strange; for she had that particular kind of shy modesty which makes any one uncomfortable at receiving caresses from a person towards whom the heart does not go forth with an impulsive welcome.[2]

[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 45.
[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* [1865], ed. by Amy M. King (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), p. 133. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Between the physical description the reader receives of Molly's physical passivity, and the narrator's interjection regarding her 'shy modesty', Gaskell appears to have something particular to say about affection and physical touch. Given that Molly is the novel's heroine and the superficial Mrs. Kirkpatrick a foil to her sincerity and simplicity of heart, Gaskell also seems to expect her readers to make inferences regarding the ideal young Englishwoman. This account of the physical affection shown between two women is not unique in the novel; such scenes abound. There are tender kisses, as when Molly 'went to Mrs. Hamley, and bent over her and kissed her; but she did not speak' (p. 78) or when 'Lady Harriet stopped to kiss Molly on the forehead' (p. 164); lingering smiles, as when 'the smile was still on [Mrs. Kirkpatrick's] pretty rosy lips, and the soft fondling of [Molly's] hand never stopped' (p.132); linked perambulations, when 'the two ladies went arm-in-arm into the ball-room […] until Miss Phoebe and Miss Piper […] came in, also arm-in-arm, but with a certain timid flurry in look and movement'(p. 281); and spontaneous levity, as when Cynthia 'suddenly took Molly round the waist, and began waltzing about the room with her' (p. 424). Many other depictions of physical touch, between virtually all the women in the text, litter the pages of *Wives and Daughters*. What is Gaskell saying about female affection, physical touch, and ideal (or not-so-ideal) feminine behaviour?

A closer look at such scenes of physical intimacy between women in nineteenth-century novels reveals much about larger Victorian concerns with affection and sensibility, femininity, and identity. Given that nineteenth century English society propagated the belief that a woman's nature suited her best for wife- and motherhood, and that certain 'feminine' traits of affection and simplicity of heart were considered essential in the domestic woman, it was necessary that women who desired to marry show themselves as possessing these characteristics. Using Judith Butler's performativity theory, which states that 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body,'[3] I contend here that one powerful vehicle for presenting a woman's femininity, and therefore desirability as a wife, was the deployment of female touch. More specifically, I argue that certain kinds of touch between close friends – specifically spontaneous, sincere and affectionate touch – signified for the Victorians a distinctly feminine identity, indicating the aptitude for sensuality and a loving, "womanly" heart. Conversely, touch between women that did not meet such standards could be read as suspicious or problematic, as I hope to show through an examination of the female characters in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1866 novel *Wives and Daughters*.

[3] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 45.

According to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophic and scientific theories, woman was not an abstract thinker; rather, she was governed by her body,[4] and her 'social worth [was grounded] in her physical nature'.[5] Women's physicality in the nineteenth century, their use of their bodily senses, should thus bear especial scrutiny since it was considered to constitute them so entirely. Although the intrinsically corporeal senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and most centrally here, touch – were read by Victorians as feminine in comparison to the masculine mind, they could be individually gendered as male or female when considered alone. Historian of the senses Constance Classen notes, for example, that while the "higher" senses of sight and sound were connected with the male, 'touch, taste and smell were generally held to be the "lower" senses and thus were readily linked to the lower sex – women.'[6] Touch, then, is doubly feminine. It is not a body's shape that is important here, or even the way it is adorned. Rather, the female body's movement – to whom it reaches out, how often, and under what circumstances, is at stake in signifying ideal femininity.

The problem of"the excess woman" led to a difficulty with the oft-touted understanding of women's nature that destined them to be wives and mothers, however. The fact that many women would not marry meant excess "supply" and therefore competition for the available opportunities to become a wife. By virtue of considerable wealth, title, or beauty, some were able to rise above such struggles, but the majority of middle class women could not, and the position of those who failed to find stability through marriage was often bleak.[7] For those who lacked the requisite portion of the above qualities, and even for those who did not, presenting themselves as ideal wives and mothers was vital. It was therefore incumbent on any woman who wished to marry to 'artfully present'[8] herself, just as merchants 'artfully present' their goods. Presenting oneself as anything, however, was a difficult issue for a Victorian woman. As Beth Newman's *Subjects on Display* makes clear, 'feminine display […] was socially devalued.'[9] Indeed, conduct writers of the period like the popular Sarah Stickney Ellis, refer to a woman's 'desire to be an object of attention'

[4] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 2.
[5] Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquer, eds, *The Making of the Modern Body*: *Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 46.
[6] Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 75.
[7] Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 27.
[8] Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1994), p. 111. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[9] Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 5.

as not just ill-advised, but as 'the besetting sin of woman'.[10] In her words, the desire to display was a moral matter of considerable consequence. Because displaying external characteristics such as wealth or beauty was often denigrated, displaying one's interior characteristics was absolutely necessary. Victorian conduct book writer Mrs. John Sandford, for example, writes that 'the romantic passion, which once almost deified [woman], is on the decline: and it is by intrinsic qualities that she must now inspire respect.'[11] Newman picks up on this mandate and echoes, 'It is necessary […] to consider [women] within a moral economy that exhorted women to abjure their propensities for display' but also to keep in mind that […] 'social ranking […] depended on some kinds of feminine display in order to signal status.'[12] Displaying internal characteristics rather than exterior wealth works hand-in-hand (so to speak) with this new moral economy.

What interior characteristics should a woman desirous of marriage, or of presenting herself as womanly, display? For the Victorians, a woman's femininity consisted to a large degree in an affectionate heart and sincerity and spontaneity of manner. Armstrong contends that the ideal domestic woman 'possessed psychological depth […] [and] excelled in the qualities that differentiated her from the male.'[13] Therefore, characteristics associated with the maternal distinguished a woman, and of first and foremost regard was warm-heartedness. In her conduct manual for young women, Ellis declares that love is woman's 'wealth' and 'her very being'.[14] According to Ellis, a woman without affection is no woman at all. More to the point, one might say that a woman without affection was not woman*ly*. Often linked during this period with the importance of affection is the importance of sincerity. As Ellis and others have made clear, it was necessary for a female to show affection to demonstrate that she was feminine and desirable. The "show" of affections, however, like the show of dress to indicate wealth and status, could be manipulated. To guard against this threat, social commentators encouraged a code of sincere behaviour as a guiding principle. Morgan explains that 'behaving simply required actions to be both consistent with one's heart and mind and free from all artifice, affectation and embellishment.'[15] In making such claims, Morgan draws from a variety of conduct books of the period. Acting naturally is a troubled process,

[10] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843), p. 110.
[11] Mrs. John Sandford, *Woman, in her Social and Domestic Character*, in HathiTrust Digital Library <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433067388144;view=1up;seq=7> [accessed 20 Sept. 2013], p. 1.
[12] Newman, p. 21.
[13] Armstrong, p. 20.
[14] Ellis, *Daughters*, pp. 146; 176.
[15] Morgan, p. 72.

for conduct book writers make such behaviours a matter of conscious choice by calling attention to them, while at the same time denigrating any display of behaviour that has an appearance of forethought or intentionality. This helps to explain why spontaneous behaviour would also be desirable, since spontaneity works in tandem with both affection and sincerity. Caroyln Oulton explains that the value of expressed feelings depends on their ability to appear 'unconstrained and spontaneous.'[16] Shows of affection that spring forth spontaneously are characterised by the fountain-like flow that Ellis and her contemporaries so highly regarded. Sincerity, too, profits from spontaneity, as that which is not premeditated seems to leap more naturally, more straight-forwardly, more earnestly, from the heart. In the beginning pages of her *Women of England*, Ellis rhapsodises, 'so great is the charm of personal attentions arising spontaneously from the heart, that women of the highest rank in society […] are frequently observed to adopt habits of personal kindness towards others.'[17] In this brief passage, Ellis deftly manages to intertwine affection, sincerity, and spontaneity with status and display. Some authors, of course, explore the dangers of an excess of sensibility in women. Jane Austen's Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* comes to mind; yet it is worth noting that Marianne's displays of sensibility nevertheless engage the masculine interest of two suitors, and establish her immediately in the kindly Sir John's 'good opinion; for to be unaffected was all that a pretty girl could want to make her mind as captivating as her person'.[18] Thus, even those authors who comprehend the dangers of too much sensibility also recognize its appeal to the male sex.

Considering that a young woman wishing to appear feminine must show herself to have an affectionate heart and sincerity and spontaneity of manner, one can perhaps understand more easily Sharon Marcus' claim that 'a woman's susceptibility to another woman defined rather than defied femininity.'[19] After all, if the first rule of womanliness is affection, then the most womanly woman will be eager to both give and receive affection, and she will be most likely to exchange that feeling with another who feels the same – another of her sex. If that affection is expected to be sincere and spontaneous, then two women will often be seen engaging in the "natural flow" of their feelings, and because women were conceived of as predominantly physical beings, the exchange of feelings will often appear through physicality. Besides, with whom else could women display affection and sensuality? According

[16] Carolyn Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 23.
[17] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England*: *Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*. (LaVergne, TN: Dodo Press, 2010), p. 4.
[18] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (New York: Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 26-27.
[19] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 83-84. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

to Marcus, women were 'counseled to be passive in relation to men' (56). The ideal settings for such exchanges, then, were female friendships.

A woman must show her inner characteristics, and thereby build and communicate her identity, through actions. Dress cannot fully signify a woman's emotional capacity, nor can the rank of her connections, or the possession of accomplishments like the ability to draw, paint, or speak French. Moreover, as Morgan asserts, the changes consequent upon urbanization 'fostered a more widespread preoccupation with […] identity [because] in these worlds of strangers where interactions typically were fleeting and superficial, people lacked the personal knowledge necessary for evaluating others according to their intrinsic merits.'[20] How would social relations be established in the new order when one could not possibly know everyone, and when a person's blood, connections, wealth, and even less, persona, were not a matter of long-standing, universal community knowledge? Women, I argue, could display an affectionate heart and sincerity and spontaneity of manner with their female friends through the deployment of affectionate touch. Touch – kissing, caressing, walking arm-in-arm – could be read by observers as a sign of a warm heart and thus, for the Victorians, a feminine nature.

Female friendships helped define femininity through mutual shows of affection, but they were encouraged during the period for other reasons as well. According to Oulton, 'successful women who represented themselves as proper ladies defined their lives in terms of their friendships with women which were thought to help prepare a woman for marriage.'[21] These friendships were believed to foster typically feminine traits of affection and sincerity in youth, as well as practices that would come to be important in marriage like attention to others and self-sacrifice. In addition, the affection shown in female friendships skirted the problem of female 'erotic excitability' since 'the Victorian marriage plot required heroines to be chaste, yet sufficiently ardent and aware of their desires to marry for love.'[22] Victorians' obsession with female modesty meant that a woman was forbidden from exercising and displaying an aptitude for sensuality with a prospective husband, but she could certainly do so with a friend. Finally, female affection provided an excellent vehicle for the establishment and display of identity because friendship was a relationship available to everyone at all times. Of course, a woman might show her affectionate nature to her family, but familial intimacy was likely to take place most frequently in the home and did not provide the opportunity to demonstrate erotic sensibility, foreclosing opportunities for its public display.

[20] Morgan, p. 104.
[21] Oulton, p. 73.
[22] Marcus, p. 83.

Though Victorians could not have access to Judith Butler's theories concerning the ways in which a person's exterior, manners, and actions signify gender, they would certainly concur that certain outer points could be read as signifying femininity. Middle class Victorians were familiar with the eighteenth-century physiognomic theories of Johann Caspar Lavater who claimed that 'the body and the face mirror the "true" character and emotional state of a person'.[23] According to his theories, characteristics of a person's inherent disposition could be read in his or her face. It is not a far stretch for persons to believe, then, that such characteristics can also be read in a person's actions. Indeed, according to Morgan:

> In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, people [believed][…] all forms of invisible reality including character, emotions and truth had […] corresponding visible manifestations that were easily perceived. […] With regard to people, the most minute details of physical appearance were thought to betray the innermost recesses of the heart and mind.[24]

Morgan does not make explicit reference to gestures or physical actions, mentioning instead the cut of a person's clothing as an example of the sort of 'minute details' which were thought to have 'significant […] implications,' but an individual's physical signals certainly seem to fit into the category of 'visible manifestations that were easily perceived.' My point is that both nineteenth-century individuals and novelists could have made use of contemporary theories of signification when attempting to communicate their own or their characters' dispositions through outward signifiers.

Modern readers of Judith Butler, on the other hand, might recognise demonstrations of female amity as one of the 'sustained set of acts that produce the effect' of gender.[25] In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler writes that '"Sex" is […] not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the forms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility'.[26] The child in any society will realise that 'we

[23] Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and control in the Victorian discourses on emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988), p. 52.
[24] Morgan, pp. 69-70.
[25] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* pp. xv-xvi.
[26] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right'.[27] In the nineteenth century, women who failed 'to do their gender right' faced the possibility that they might end their life stigmatised as old maids, never having achieved that position nearly universally cried out to be best, most worthy, and most "natural".

Butler theorises that gender consists of actions and deeds: 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame.' Such actions include 'bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds' (p. 191). Thus, gender plays out on the exterior of the body. Affectionate touch is a 'bodily gesture' that indicates qualities considered feminine according to the 'regulatory frame' of the time. Butler would disagree entirely that women are 'by nature' anything at all, but she clearly states that such actions 'produce the appearance of substance' (p. 45) even if the substance itself is ultimately nonexistent. Kissing, caressing, shaking hands, and walking arm-in-arm with other women are all examples of 'bodily gestures [and] movements' that relay gender expectations. Because these deeds signify affection, which is the primary characteristic of femininity for the Victorians, such actions appear to manifest a woman's particularly feminine nature.

According to Butler, one's actions must also be endlessly repeated. This is because one never *becomes* one's gender. In Butler's words, 'gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker' (p. 152). Because a stable gender is never reached, one must forever be insisting and showing that one is one's gender. Gender is 'a norm that can never be fully internalised […] gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody' (p. 192). Because an individual can never embody her gender norms, can never *be* feminine, she must perpetually *act* feminine in order to maintain the gendered illusion. Butler's reasoning here proceeds from her belief that there is no inherent core to an individual, a notion the Victorians would have refuted. That identity must be constantly enacted, however, is not in conflict. Victorians certainly believed, for example, that 'minor parts of domestic and social intercourse […] strengthen into habit […] and […] form the basis of moral character.'[28] Thus, character is formed by a repetition of deeds and acts. In addition, the 'fleeting'[29] nature of social interaction meant that identity must be constantly reenacted for new people and scenes. Lastly, to cease enacting one's gender would have itself seemed like a repression of identity and thus an affectation.

Finally, in Butler's view, the action of gender 'is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not

[27] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 190. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[28] Ellis, *Women,* Preface.
[29] Morgan, p. 104.

inconsequential.'[30] While a woman can perform actions alone, actions only signify gender to others when those others are able to read the gendered cues. If the deed that signifies a woman's gender is a show of affection to another, then at least one other person must be present every time the deed is performed. Even when no additional onlookers are present, as in a private meeting between two individuals, the recipient of a woman's affection is ever present to mark the demonstration of a woman's warm, affectionate, feminine nature. Dress, for example, does not necessitate the presence of another individual in the way a show of physical affection does. This is yet another reason that touch is such an effective signifier of femininity.

Becoming a wife was the principal measure of female success in Victorian England, and to do so a woman had to show herself to be feminine, a characteristic defined by qualities of affection and sincerity, most easily shown through female-to-female interaction, of which the physical manifestation is intimate touch. Therefore touching between female friends was a near perfect vehicle for the establishment and display of a feminine identity. Touch is a more effective signifier of affection than language – as in, according to Marcus, the 'iterated, cumulative, hyperbolic references to passion, exclusivity, idealization, [and] complicity' exchanged between close friends'[31] – firstly because visual cues have the ability to reach a larger audience that aural ones, and secondly because body language, or 'manner,' is considered a more authentic signifier than words because it is seems less open to manipulation. In addition, scenes of physical touch are certainly more immediately and viscerally titillating to the observer than words.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* is ideal to examine in relation to female affectionate touch due to the sheer number of such scenes, and also because the narrator makes it clear that touch speaks volumes. For example, when Cynthia prepares to marry and leave the house for good, we are told that 'Lady Harriet saw, too, that in a very quiet way, [Cynthia] had taken Molly's hand, and was holding it all the time, as if loth to think of their approaching separation - *somehow, she and Lady Harriet were brought nearer together by this little action than they had ever been before*' (p. 607, emphasis added). This 'little action' that brings Cynthia and Lady Harriet nearer together is a signifier of the love and affection that Cynthia is able to bear for Molly, and as such it raises Cynthia's value in Lady Harriet's eyes. Such touch is one of the culturally legible acts that signify gender.

The novel details the life of young Molly Gibson as she grows to womanhood in Hollingford, a fictional 'country town' in England in the early part of the nineteenth century (p.6). Losing her mother very young, she lives for several years

[30] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 191.
[31] Marcus, p. 54.

only with her father, until he decides to marry so that Molly can enjoy 'the kind of tender supervision which […] all girls of that age require' (p. 102). Whilst Mr. Gibson courts the former governess of the local county lord, Hyacinth Clare Kirkpatrick, Molly lives with Squire and Mrs. Hamley, to both of whom she becomes closely attached, as well as to their sons, Osborne and Roger (pp. 61-147). Following her father's remarriage, Molly lives again at home with her father, stepmother, and her stepmother's daughter, Cynthia Kirkpatrick, with whom she develops an intimate friendship. Cynthia, Molly, Osborne, and Roger move through a series of romantic entanglements until Cynthia marries a well-to-do young man in London (p. 597), and Roger realises his mistake in idealizing Cynthia. He turns his affections to Molly (p. 631), but Gaskell's sudden death precluded the consummation of their courtship.

A close look at the three most prominent women in the novel, Hyacinth Kirkpatrick Gibson, Cynthia Kirkpatrick, and Molly Gibson – and their respective deployments of female touch – illustrates the ways in which touch is associated with the feminine, a mark of the ideal woman only when employed spontaneously and sincerely, that is, according to the 'highly rigid regulatory frame'[32] of the time. Mrs. Gibson makes use of touch intentionally in order to display herself as an affectionate woman and to manipulate those around her when it suits her purpose. Such affectations of manner show her ultimate artificiality and shallowness. Her daughter, more forthcoming in her touch, appears to be 'all things to all men,' (p. 217) but the absence of a corresponding deep emotion behind her physical actions belies their sincerity. The novel's heroine, Molly Gibson, on the other hand, may be inexperienced and lacking in the more obvious feminine charms, but she is always shown to be sincere and spontaneous and, her touching behaviours reflective of the deep wealth of feeling in her heart. As such, Molly exemplifies the ideal young Englishwoman, and in consequence is rewarded with the love of the intelligent and kind-hearted Roger Hamley.

Wanting a wife to look after his daughter, Gibson's first thoughts regarding Mrs. Kirkpatrick are entirely practical. However, Mrs. Kirkpatrick's 'agreeable and polished manners' (p. 113), 'the harmonious colours of her dress, and her slow and graceful movements,' make him begin to think of her less as a stepmother than 'as a wife for himself' (p. 106). He is perhaps fooled by her blush when he comes in, and her 'hysterical tears' when he proposes (p. 107). Such displays of emotion, combined with an outward appearance so pleasant and agreeable, certainly make Mr. Gibson believe the marriage will be an advantage both for himself and Molly. But Mr. Gibson is misled. Mrs. Kirkpatrick blushes upon seeing the doctor because she is reminded that Lord and Lady Cumnor have recently discussed her and Gibson (p. 105). Her 'hysterical tears' find vent because 'it was such a wonderful relief to feel

[32] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 45.

that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood' (p. 107). By suggesting her femininity, however, her affected manners and gestures still bring her to the altar and the financial stability she desires.

In addition to her dress and manner, Mrs. Kirkpatrick often deploys shows of physical affection, but the implied warmth of her actions does not spring from a rush of genuine emotion. Rather, she enacts the expected gender norms of femininity only until she attains her objective – to marry. Accordingly, she mostly demonstrates affection when and with whom it will be most effective for her: that is to say, before her marriage, and with her future stepdaughter. The reader has already been informed that Mrs. Kirkpatrick has no great affection for young women because 'all the trials of her life were connected with girls in some way' (p. 126). Nevertheless, in their first meeting when both are aware of their impending new relations to one another, 'Mrs. Kirkpatrick was as caressing as could be. She held Molly's hand in hers as they sat together in the library, after the first salutations were over. She kept stroking it from time to time, and purring out inarticulate sounds of loving satisfaction, as she gazed in the blushing face' (p. 127). The vehicle Mrs. Kirkpatrick utilises for her dissimulation is affectionate touch. Though her caresses, Mrs. Kirkpatrick clearly intends to ingratiate herself with the girl who is the primary reason she is being released from 'the struggle of earning her own livelihood' (p. 126). But she also attempts to use that affectionate touch as a manner of control. When Molly shows herself to be willing to speak up to her social superior, Lady Cumnor, 'Mrs. Kirkpatrick fondled [Molly's] hand more perseveringly than ever, hoping thus to express a sufficient amount of sympathy to prevent her from saying anything injudicious' (p. 133). In such scenes, Mrs. Kirkpatrick seeks to display herself as a loving woman through the use of physical touch even though her inner emotions do not correspond with her outer gestures. As such, her gestures are a prime example of the sort of 'affectation of manner' that Ellis and others so clearly despise in women. In direct contrast to Molly, Mrs. Kirkpatrick's affectations of manner reinforce her ultimate artificiality and self-centeredness. In addition, the cessation of her physical affection to Molly after her marriage suggests that Mrs. Kirkpatrick's aura of ideal femininity will not be maintained because she does not, as Butler says she must, endlessly reenact her gender – in this case, through the deployment of affectionate female touch. It is not long indeed until Mr. Gibson himself realises that his new wife is not what he had first imagined (p. 274).

Mrs. Kirkpatrick's daughter, Cynthia, appears for a time to be an ideal young woman. Because they are nearly the same age and both unmarried young women, it is Cynthia who provides the strongest contrast with Molly. She exhibits womanliness more readily than the more awkward Molly; she dresses with 'exquisite taste', walks with a 'stately step' and 'was very beautiful', though 'no one with such loveliness

ever appeared so little conscious of it' (p. 217). In sum, Cynthia displays a wonderful combination of those qualities much valued in women – dress, carriage, and beauty – seamlessly merged with humility, another prized trait of womanhood. She "does" her gender almost perfectly. Nevertheless, although Cynthia is described as 'being all things to all men' (p. 217), it is quite clear by the end of the novel that Cynthia will yet leave something to be desired as a wife and, quite likely, as a mother. Why so? Cynthia is sincere and spontaneous, but lacks depth of affection behind her actions. The ways in which Cynthia differs from Molly in deploying affectionate touch help to demonstrate, before long, how Cynthia's 'grain is different, somehow' (p. 482).

In terms of touch, Cynthia is a figure in-between her mother's shows of emotionality and Molly's sincere behaviour. At their first meeting, 'Cynthia took [Molly] in her arms, and kissed her on both cheeks' (p. 214). Her greeting to her new relation, unlike her mother's, is not manipulative. She tells Molly straight out to 'stop a minute' and takes Molly's hands and looks her in the face whereupon she candidly admits 'I think I shall like you. […] I was afraid I should not' (p. 215). Immediately the reader and Molly learn that Cynthia is sincere and, if not especially warm-hearted, at least amiable, for, in the French fashion in which she has been trained, she makes a simple and open-hearted gesture of kissing Molly on both cheeks, and then looks at her frankly and openly.

Later, Cynthia openly tells her new sister that, 'I do believe I love you, little Molly, whom I have only known for ten days, better than any one' (*sic*) (p. 219). However, that Cynthia can grow to love someone better than anyone else in ten days is not a testament to the strength of her emotions, but rather a consequence of the fact that she has 'been tossed about so' (p. 327). She herself admits that 'I never feel carried off my feet by love for any one, not even for you, little Molly, and I am sure I love you' (p. 375). This is Cynthia's failing, the reason why, for all her charms and graces and fascinating ways, it is Molly, and not Cynthia, who is Gaskell's heroine. Cynthia, merrily and amiably enough, will come 'Up behind [Molly], and putting her two hands round Molly's waist, [peep] over her shoulder, [and put] out her lips to be kissed' (p. 374). Her physical affection shows her to be sincere, spontaneous, and placidly affectionate, but not deeply loving. Cynthia, unlike Molly, cannot be consumed by her emotions, and so it is unlikely she will be consumed by love of her husband or her children. Her physicality, accordingly, is pleasant and sincere, but never intense or passionate. Gaskell grants her a suitably wealthy and handsome young husband in London, but she cannot deserve the heart of the novel's hero.

That position rests with the novel's heroine and ideal young woman, Molly Gibson. In contrast with her brilliant stepsister, she lacks a sort of intrinsic taste which Cynthia seems never to be without (p. 217), as when Molly is talked into ordering a hideous silk pattern for a dress (p. 60). She is often disordered where

Cynthia is neat. Just after Molly learns that Roger has proposed to Cynthia and then gone away for years without bidding her goodbye, Molly sees herself and Cynthia reflected in a mirror. She sees herself 'red-eyed, pale, with lips dyed with blackberry juice, her curls tangled, her bonnet pulled awry, her gown torn – and contrasted it with Cynthia's brightness and bloom, and the trim elegance of her dress. ''Oh! It is no wonder!" thought poor Molly' (p. 374). No wonder that Roger has proposed to Cynthia? No wonder that he left without saying goodbye? Fortunately for Molly, she places too much emphasis here on the merits of dress. In her earnestness, sincerity, and depth of feeling, Molly has more to offer in the form of her internal disposition. Such characteristics can be seen throughout the text in her displays of physical affection.

In her self-assurance, Cynthia regularly clasps Molly affectionately long before Molly begins to reciprocate. It is surely no coincidence that in a novel as preoccupied with physical contact as *Wives and Daughters*, Cynthia kisses, clasps, and caresses Molly in a half dozen scenes, in the span of over one hundred pages, before Molly is first shown voluntarily taking Cynthia's hand. These repeated demonstrations on Cynthia's part are important to her feminine identity since, as Butler reminds us, gendered expression must be endlessly repeated. And these demonstrations of identity, like her mother's affectations, do earn her something – after all, she marries well. She differs, nevertheless, from Molly in her depth of feeling. The time Molly takes before initiating such affection on her own is significant. This absence of touch initially is not an indicator of Molly's general attitude toward the display of physical affection, since she is seen early in the novel 'kneeling at Mrs. Hamley's feet, holding the poor lady's hands, kissing them, murmuring soft words' (p. 85) and readily kissing Miss Browning following a disagreement between them (p. 151). To discover the worth of Molly, we must return to the scene that opens this chapter:

> Molly and her future stepmother wandered about in the gardens with their arms round each other's waists, or hand in hand, like two babes in the wood; Mrs. Kirkpatrick active in such endearments, Molly passive, and feeling within herself very shy and strange; for she had that particular kind of shy modesty which makes any one uncomfortable at receiving caresses from a person towards whom the heart does not go forth with an impulsive welcome (p. 133).

Molly reciprocates the touch that is offered to her, as by holding hands with Mrs. Kirkpatrick, or wrapping her arm around her soon-to-be stepmother's waist, but she does not initiate it, and is, as the narrator writes, 'passive' in her participation. Her

'modesty,' that necessary component of womanliness for the Victorians, is not made uncomfortable by touching another woman, but rather by the lack of sincere affection she feels for her companion. Her 'heart does not go forth' to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, and thus she feels uncomfortable when her physical body does indeed 'go forth' alone. For the Victorians, physical touch is appropriate and commended only when it is the outward sign of a genuine inner feeling. Also significant here is the narrator's addition of the adjective 'impulsive' which acts as a foil to Mrs. Kirkpatrick's more deliberate conduct. The scene acts as a guarantee of Molly's authenticity. The reader can be sure that, in the many later scenes in the book in which Molly initiates touch herself or participates more wholeheartedly, the outside behaviour does indeed reflect the inside feeling.

When Molly at length reaches out to Cynthia, several important elements mark her touch as a more authentic gesture. Cynthia lies in her room, privately troubled over Mr. Preston's move to town. When Cynthia remarks plaintively that she intends to go out as a governess, Molly responds:

> "You're over tired," continued she, sitting down on the bed, and taking Cynthia's passive hand, and stroking it softly - a mode of caressing that had come down to her from her mother - whether as an hereditary instinct, or as a lingering remembrance of the tender ways of the dead woman, Mr. Gibson often wondered within himself when he observed it (p. 327).

Here, Molly's gesture appears in sympathetic and affectionate response to another and is associated by the narrator with Molly's long-deceased mother. The correlation noted here between touch and the mother is not arbitrary; Molly imitates a mother's gesture as if through 'hereditary instinct'. Her touch springs from something apparently intrinsic within her; according to Gaskell, it outwardly reflects the inner core. This deep wealth of maternal feeling is evidently an emotion Cynthia lacks due to her own upbringing. This is not the only scene in which Molly's shows of affection are connected with her value as a mother, that quality which for the Victorians which was the most intrinsic element of woman. Later, when Cynthia weeps bitterly for Mr. Gibson's rebukes, Molly 'took Cynthia into her arms with gentle power, and laid her head against her own breast, as if the one had been a mother, and the other a child', murmuring, '"Oh, my darling!" […] "I do so love you, dear, dear Cynthia!" and she stroked her hair, and kissed her eyelids; Cynthia passive all the while' (p. 545) In these scenes, Molly stroking Cynthia's hand and hair, raising Cynthia in her arms, and kissing Cynthia's eyes marks her as the true ideal woman by virtue of her

aptitude for bottomless affection and for mothering – her ability to channel, as it were, her own mother. According to the 'highly rigid regulatory frame'[33] of gender expectations in Victorian England, Molly exemplifies the ideal young Englishwoman, and in consequence is rewarded with the love of the intelligent and kind-hearted Roger Hamley, the novel's hero, while Cynthia's lesser depths of affection only earn her a pleasant but unknown husband in London.

It can thus be seen that though Mrs. Kirkpatrick and Cynthia show many signs on the feminine in terms of their dress, manner, and language, close observations of their touching behaviours help to show how the two are lacking in the feminine ideal. As such, touch is one of the most important of the 'acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that […] produce the appearance of' gender,[34] because where other signifiers of the feminine fail to reflect the inner characteristics of the subject, touch provides a more accurate picture.

In Hyacinth Gibson, Cynthia Kirkpatrick, and Molly Gibson, the text of *Wives and Daughters* exemplifies gender expectations of women, especially of young, unmarried women, in Victorian society. Ideologically conditioned to accept marriage and domesticity as their primary objective and role in life, huge numbers of young Victorian women wished, or were at least expected, to marry and nurture families in the sphere of the home. In order to marry well, and to best fulfil the role of nurturer, a woman needed to be affectionate, warm-hearted, spontaneous, and sincere, especially after the Census of 1851 revealed that many women would never have the occasion to marry due to the "excess" of women in the population. Opportunities to demonstrate such a nature to others were afforded through the vehicle of female affectionate touch, which is displayed in dozens of novels throughout the period. In describing touching scenes between women, novelists accomplished two things. First, they prescribed codes of ideal gendered behaviour to society at large, and second, they communicated more fully the personas of their female characters to widespread audiences in different regions of England who nevertheless shared common gender expectations. Too often, however, scenes of female amity are so expected and naturalised in nineteenth century fiction that academics overlook them altogether. Yet analyses of these scenes, as I have shown, can assist scholars in developing deeper understandings of social conventions, and ultimately of gender constructs, in the nineteenth century.

[33] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 45.
[34] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 45.

Bibliography

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility* (New York: Norton & Company, 2002)

Ellis, Sarah Stickney, *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843; repr. NA)

_____, *The Women of England*: *Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*. (London: NP, 1839; repr. LaVergne: Dodo Press, 2010)

Gaskell, Elizabeth, *Wives and Daughters* [1865], ed. by Amy M. King (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005)

Sandford, Mrs. John, *Woman, in her Social and Domestic Character*, in <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433067388144; view=1up;seq=7> [accessed 20 Sept. 2013]

Armstrong, Nancy, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

_____, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990)

Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012)

Gallagher, Catherine and Thomas Laquer, eds, *The Making of the Modern Body*: *Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1987)

Gowing, Laura, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)

Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982)

Marcus, Sharon, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

Morgan, Marjorie, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994)

Newman, Beth, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004)

Oulton, Carolyn, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Stedman, Gesa, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and control in the Victorian discourses on emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988)

MELTING BODIES: THE DISSOLUTION OF BODILY BOUNDARIES IN MILTON AND SWINBURNE

Laura Fox Gill
(University of Sussex)

Abstract
This paper explores connections between treatments of the body and its boundaries in the poetry of John Milton and Algernon Charles Swinburne. My aim is twofold: first, I wish to assert Milton's direct influence on Swinburne's poetry, rather than as a vague indirect background for Victorian poetry in general. Second, I argue for Swinburne's importance to our understanding of Victorian sexuality and Milton's consequent importance as a significant source for Swinburne's conception of the sexual body.

Swinburne's poetry is immersed in the tense and conflicted discourse surrounding the sexual body in the nineteenth century, represented by medical and cultural writing of the period on the figure of the hermaphrodite, and more widely, by the increasing dissolution of bodily boundaries. Milton directly provides Swinburne with ways of rethinking and presenting these 'melting bodies', making the Swinburnean body, and that of Victorian culture more generally, Miltonic in fundamental ways.

The two poets are related first through their mutual engagement with the figure of the hermaphrodite as the pinnacle of a metaphysics of melting: a pervasive concern with melting bodies and the dissolution of fleshy thresholds. Moving beyond the hermaphroditic, I explore a more omnipresent sense of melting, merging, cleaving-together identifiable in Milton's metaphysics and in the poetic composition of both Milton and Swinburne. Placed in relation to the importance of Sappho and Baudelaire's conception of the sexual body for Swinburne, Milton's influence is significant for what it can offer to supplement and surpass that of these two noteworthy figures.

The Victorian conception of the sexual body simultaneously involves an anxious desire to clearly delineate the sexes, and a sense that such a project might be founded on fallacy. The Victorian sexual body has come to be seen as a site of conflict and tension: in both medical and cultural discourse, the dissolution of bodily boundaries, or what I refer to here as "melting bodies", is central to a Victorian fascination with, and fear of, the sexual body and its mutability. Mid- and late-nineteenth-century anxiety and aesthetics whirl around a notion of bodily "melting". This paper identifies the poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne ('first and foremost a poet of the body'[1]) as vital for an understanding of this "melting" of the Victorian sexual body, and aims to illuminate the significance of John Milton's poetry in Swinburne's conception of melting bodies. Milton is to be understood as a voice among many for Swinburne, who read and used his reading extensively, but Milton is, I will argue, a

[1] Richard Sieburth, 'Poetry and Obscenity: Baudelaire and Swinburne', *Comparative Literature*, 36 (1984), pp. 343–353 (p. 351).

particularly important voice for Swinburne. His conceptual influence on Swinburne's imagining of the sexual body both supplements and surpasses that of Sappho and Baudelaire, both considered crucial in Swinburne's poetic development.

Swinburne's poetry questions the stability of sexual difference, which Jill L. Matus identifies as a primary anxiety of the Victorian conception of the sexual body. 'While Victorian theories of sexual differentiation certainly emphasized the great difference between the sexes and the natural complementarity of male and female,' she writes, 'they were also very much concerned with the instability of that difference.'[2] Upholding the boundaries between the sexes in connection to societal roles as well as sexual activity was 'Victorian cultural imperative', but an analysis of the biomedical discourses of the mid- and late- nineteenth shows uncertainty within this rigidity, rife with belief in mutability.[3]

Swinburne's poetry can also be considered a primary discourse on nineteenth-century peripheral sexualities, the concern of Foucault. In his argument against the understanding of nineteenth-century sexuality as "repressed", Foucault writes about sex as being as being expressed, assessed and obsessed through engagement in a multitude of discourses: 'sex—be it refined or rustic—had to be put into words.'[4] The 'discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' Foucault writes, resulted in increased discourse on sexual transgressions – it was the 'time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were.' As these 'peripheral sexualities' became the focus of sexual discourse, eyes were drawn to the edges of sexual society.[5] The way we discuss these 'peripheral sexualities' is bound up with the idea of permeable fleshly boundaries. Foucault goes on to say that 'From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, [peripheral sexualities] circulated through the pores of society'.[6]

Swinburne's 'peripheral' bodies challenge boundaries of sexual difference, cleaving to one another with edges that mingle, a literal "melting" of boundaries that disrupts binary sexual difference. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that Swinburne's poetry is essential for an understanding of fascinated and fearful Victorian thinking about the sexual body. The conception of melting bodily boundaries that can be found in the poetry of Milton is pervasive in Swinburne's poetic representation of the body.

---

[2] Jill L. Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 21.

[3] Matus points out, for example, 'the Darwinian notion that humankind's ancestors were hermaphroditic, the late nineteenth-century interest in the "man-woman" and androgyny, and the Freudian concern with bisexuality and a genderless libido', Matus, p. 23.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, [1976] 1998), p. 32.

[5] Foucault, pp. 38–39.

[6] Foucault, p. 40.

Extant studies of Swinburne's relationship to Milton are uncommon and elusive: Swinburne's name appears in James Nelson's *Milton and the Victorians* (1963) almost as an afterthought, whose 'devotion' to Milton and the ancients is only 'to some extent' comparable to that of Tennyson, Landor and Arnold.[7] William Wilson looks at Miltonic influence through Swinburne's critical response to Arnold, claiming that 'to Swinburne, Arnold was disturbingly un-Miltonic.'[8] This is typical of the way in which Swinburne's relationship to Milton is discussed, as an addendum. More recently, in *Bearing Blindness* (2001), Catherine Maxwell claims Swinburne is central to studies of Milton's influence. However, again, the work of the two poets is connected through a male lyric tradition which places poets such as Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning chronologically and conceptually between Milton and Swinburne.[9] I argue that these studies erroneously dilute the directly Miltonic aspects of Swinburne's writing. In concentrating this diluted connection I aim to show that the poetry of Milton provides Swinburne with a direct blueprint for his melting bodies, making Milton's bodily metaphysics a vehicle for Victorian tensions concerning the sexual body. The Swinburnean body, and so, that of Victorian culture more generally, is Miltonic in fundamental ways.

Primarily, Swinburne uses Milton to access a model of melting bodies and boundaries that surpasses the Sapphic model. Milton offers a system in which the fluidity of sexuality and desire is unlimited by postlapsarian human biology. Swinburne also finds in Milton's system of bodily metaphysics the prelapsarian potential for combining the aesthetic and the abject in a way that surpasses the similar potential offered by Baudelaire. Where Baudelaire mixes the aesthetic and the abject, there is conflict between the two; Milton's aetiological world contains the abject in no conflict with the aesthetic.

In *Paradise Lost*,[10] the gendered, biological boundaries of the body dissolve in three primary ways. The first is seen in the hermaphrodite: a concentrated representation of the collapse of the boundary between male and female that haunts

[7] 'Tennyson, as we have seen, anticipated Hopkins and Bridges in his simultaneous devotion to both the ancient Greek and Roman poets and Milton. But he was not alone in this. Walter Savage Landor and Matthew Arnold, as well as Swinburne to some extent, exhibit the same devotion.' See James G. Nelson, *The Sublime Puritan: Milton and the Victorians* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 142.

[8] William Wilson, 'Algernon Agonistes: "Thalassius," Visionary Strength, and Swinburne's Critique of Arnold's "Sweetness and Light"', *Victorian Poetry*, 19 (1981), pp. 381–395 (p. 382).

[9] Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 37.

[10] All citations from the poetry of John Milton are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton,* ed. by William Kerrigan, John Peter Rumrich & Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007). Book and line references are indicated in the text.

Victorian visions of the sexual body.[11] Early in the epic, Milton describes the Holy Spirit in hermaphroditic terms as masculine in its impregnation of the earth, and feminine in its act of 'brooding' on the world 'Dove-like', as if incubating an egg:

> Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
> Wast pregnant, and with mighty wings outspread
> Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
> And mad'st it pregnant (I. 19-22)[12]

Maxwell briefly discusses this passage, in which 'the Spirit combines brooding (a female quality) with insemination (a male quality)', writing that 'if Milton's powers do shade into each other, it is with a predominance of female characterisation […] The Spirit then might be more female than androgynous, annexing the capabilities of the male.'[13] Interestingly, however, though the idea of incubating eggs is primarily maternal, doves are a species that *share* incubation duties: the male and female parents take turns 'brooding'. Mourning doves will not approach their nest 'if they see a person anywhere near' and so the switching occurs in secrecy, giving the impression to anyone studying the nest that the pair are a single bird; male and female blend together.[14] Milton's Holy Spirit (perhaps unintentionally) is then doubly hermaphroditic, in fact more androgynous than female.

The Holy Spirit is not the only hermaphroditic being in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's angels are also sexually indeterminate figures, 'desiring beings' that 'are ideal inhabitants of Milton's self-generating ambisexual cosmos'.[15] Though Milton's angels are 'spirits masculine' (X. 890), they have the ability to take on female form, or mixed form, 'For spirits when they please / Can either sex assume, or both; so soft / And uncompounded is their essence pure' (I. 423-425).[16] Milton's angels engage

[11] The nineteenth-century conception of hermaphroditism demands that we think of gender and sexuality as overlapping: in the late nineteenth century, as Foucault reminds us, homosexuality was *invented* – it came to be understood in terms of collective identity rather than singular action, 'a species' as opposed to 'the sodomite' ('a temporary aberration'). He writes that 'Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a *hermaphroditism of the soul*.' Foucault, p. 43, my emphasis.

[12] I am indebted to Christoph Singer for first highlighting for me the hermaphroditic nature of this passage in a conference paper titled ''Heretics in the Truth' – John Milton in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*', presented at 'Dante and Milton: National Visionaries and Visionary Nationalists' at Senate House in November 2013.

[13] Maxwell, *Bearing Blindness*, pp. 19–20.

[14] See Margaret Morse Nice, 'A Study of the Nesting of Mourning Doves', *The Auk*, 39 (1922), pp. 457–474 (p. 465).

[15] Karma deGruy, 'Desiring Angels: The Angelic Body in Paradise Lost', *Criticism*, 54 (2012), pp. 117–149 (p. 129).

[16] All citations from the poetry of John Milton are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Essential*

with gender fluidly: assuming 'both' sexes, if 'they please'. In *Paradise Lost*, then, the hermaphrodite is associated with both the creation of the earthly world and the divine beings that populate Heaven (and Hell). As deGruy comments. 'Creation contains the active elements it needs to generate itself; gender and sex are as mutable and circumstantial as the angelic body.'[17]

The hermaphrodite is therefore central to Milton's epic, and is the ideal point from which to begin comparison with Swinburne's melting bodies. As Lindsay Smith writes, 'the hermaphrodite was central to Swinburne's poetic project',[18] which forms part of a broader 'preoccupation with bodily indeterminacy.'[19] Swinburne's poem 'Hermaphroditus', a clear example of the centrality of the figure in his 'poetic project', takes inspiration from a statue, 'the Roman copy of a Greek original', he had visited in the Louvre in 1863.[20] The figure lies upon a couch, and from one side appears unequivocally female, but from the other is seen to have male genitalia. Swinburne's 'Hermaphroditus' represents this dual incarnation of the sexes through a concern for liminality and pairing of opposed concepts; he writes of 'some brief space' that lies 'between sleep and life' (15).[21] Smith notes the 'series of perfect deferred doublings: 'love/sleep'; 'shadow/light'' that exist 'in that barely imaginable space between "eyelids" and "eyes"'.[22] Swinburne also speaks directly of 'melting' in 'Hermaphroditus' when he writes 'Thy moist limbs melted' (53). We will return to this moment below.

The hermaphrodite stands as a basic link connecting the bodily in Milton and Swinburne. Beyond the hermaphroditic, a more clandestine interest in permeable bodily boundaries builds a relation of conceptual influence between the two poets. 'Melting' penetrates the basic biological construction of Milton's beings. This takes us to the second form of boundary dissolution in *Paradise Lost*: Miltonic excretion. Consider the start of Book Five:

> Now Morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
> Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl,
> When Adam waked, so customed, for his sleep

Prose of John Milton, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Peter Rumrich & Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007). Book and line references are indicated in the text.

[17] deGruy, p. 129.

[18] Lindsay Smith, *Pre-Raphaelitism: Poetry and Painting* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2013), p. 64.

[19] Smith, p. 82.

[20] Smith, p. 86.

[21] All citations from the work of A. C. Swinburne are taken from *Poems and Ballads & Atalanta in Calydon*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (London: Penguin Books, 2000). Line references are indicated in the text.

[22] Smith, p. 88.

> Was airy light, from pure digestion bred,
> And temperate vapours bland, which th' only sound
> Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,
> Lightly dispersed, and the shrill matin song
> Of birds on every bough; so much the more
> His wonder was to find unwakened Eve
> With tresses discomposed, and glowing cheek,
> As through unquiet rest (V. 1-11)

Adam awakens to find Eve beside him 'with tresses discomposed, and glowing cheek, / As through unquiet rest.' (V. 10-11). This unusually unquiet rest was provoked by Satan whispering to Eve in her sleep, as he attempted to 'raise / At least distempered, discontented thoughts, / Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires' (IV. 806-808). Eve's disturbed sleep is all the more alarming when juxtaposed with Adam's 'airy light' slumber, 'from pure digestion bred, / And temperate vapours bland' (V. 4-5). Gordon Teskey suggests that these 'vapours bland' are a 'discreet answer to the perennial question of Edenic excretion'; Adam's slumber was 'airy light' because of the efficiency of 'Edenic excretion'. Teskey suggests that 'nothing is left over as waste except mild vapors emitted through the pores' which the goddess of dawn 'disperses with her fan.'[23] In Teskey's description of excretion through the pores, the edges of the prelapsarian human body are permeable.

Angelic excretion also occurs by way of perspiration. Describing the moment that Raphael sits down to eat with Adam and Eve in paradise, Milton writes:

> So down they sat,
> And to their viands fell, nor seemingly
> The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
> Of theologians, but with keen dispatch
> Of real hunger, and concoctive heat
> To transubstantiate; what redounds, transpires
> Through spirits with ease (V. 433-439).

The *OED* states the use of 'Transpires' as meaning 'To emit or cause to pass in the state of vapour through the walls or surface of a body' since at least the sixteenth century.[24] Teskey's reading of the 'vapours bland' as excretion through the pores, as similar in kind to angelic transpiration, then aligns neatly Miltonic monism, offering

[23] Gordon Teskey ed., note from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 106.
[24] 'Transpire, V.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204994> [accessed 22 November 2013].

further evidence that the hermaphroditic is central to Milton's epic. The following excerpt from Book Five forms an explanation of Milton's heavenly monism, in which the single universal substance comes from (and consists of) God:

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms, various degrees
> Of substance' (V. 469-474)

In Milton's aetiology, God creates the universe from himself (*creatio ex deo*) as opposed to from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). 'One first matter' proceeds from God and is used in all beings in 'various forms' and with 'various degrees / Of substance,' with the aim that they will then 'up to him return'. The key here is the notion of 'degrees', which represents angels and humans as part of a monistic *hierarchy* of substance; angels are made of the same substance as humans, but being superior are significantly lighter. Stephen Fallon writes that 'Milton's materialist monism treats spirit and matter as manifestations, differing in degree and not qualitatively, of the one corporeal substance'.[25] This monistic notion of *creatio ex deo* theoretically aligns with the form of the hermaphroditic considered above in the impregnation and incubation of the world, where the creating force contains the materials for all of creation. Milton's holy hermaphrodite is not rendered infertile by the conjoining of two sexes, but instead is given *more* reproductive power, capable of reproducing asexually.

Milton's construction of angelic digestion runs parallel to his explanation of angelic sexuality and expression of love: the third primary form of boundary dissolution. In the eighth book, Adam asks Raphael 'Love not the Heav'nly spirits, and how their love / Express they, by looks only, or do they mix / Irradiance, virtual or immediate touch?' (VIII. 615-617) Raphael responds:

> Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
> (And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
> In eminence, and obstacle find none
> Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars:
> Easier than air with air, if spirits embrace,
> Total they mix, union of pure with pure
> Desiring; nor restrained conveyance need

[25] Stephen M. Fallon, 'The Substance of Epic Angels', *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 102.

As flesh to mix with flesh, or soul with soul. (VIII. 622-629)

The sexuality of Milton's angels is, as Fallon writes, 'neither the conjunction of gross animal bodies nor a disembodied meeting of minds or souls.'[26] It stands on the boundary between the two. Material angelic bodies find no 'exclusive bars' or 'obstacle' in expression of love, and a 'spirits embrace' (which seems close enough to 'angelic sex') is associated with ease and absolute amalgamation: mixture is 'easier than air with air', a 'total' 'union of pure with pure'. This last phrase, 'union of pure with pure' highlights again Milton's monism. The *OED* has for 'pure' 'not mixed with any other substance or material', suggesting that a 'union' of 'pure' substances is in fact an oxymoron, but in Milton's early universe there is no conceptual conflict between 'mixture' and 'pure' because angels consist of the same single divine substance. This relates to the passage from Book Six quoted above (VI. 344-353). deGruy comments that 'In this state of being, desire is not constrained by body; rather, body is actually shaped by desire, becoming "all heart" or "all head" according to individual will.'[27]

Angelic expressions of love, then, dissolve bodily boundaries. Angelic beings are still considered individuals (with names, and freedom) but in expressions of love they find no 'obstacle' or 'membrane'. As deGruy writes, 'erotic activity is privileged by being granted to angels whose undivided natures allow them an unproblematic satisfaction of embodied appetite.'[28] This boundary-less merging of spirits finds itself distorted in Adam's passionate cry after Eve informs him of her disobedience:

no no, I feel
The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (IX. 913-916)

And, later:

So forcible within my heart I feel
The bond of nature draw me to my own,
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
Our state cannot be severed, we are one,
One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself. (IX. 955-959)

Adam's claim that 'from thy state / Mine never shall be parted' follows directly from

[26] Fallon, p. 144.
[27] deGruy, p. 125.
[28] deGruy, p. 123.

the 'link of nature' he feels with Eve; that she is (in Biblical language) 'bone of my bone' and 'flesh of flesh'. He goes on to speak of their identification and their resistance to separation ('Our state cannot be severed, we are one'). Although there is clearly a difference between Raphael's angelic incorporeal 'union of pure with pure' and Adam's 'One flesh' (an image which lends itself more to the connotations of 'assimilation' than 'union') they both demand a denial of separation and a participation in 'oneness' (or, forms of monism). In Milton's hierarchy, then, those closer to God are more easily conceived as hermaphroditic, but the melting of bodies is present in all stages of creation. The figure of the hermaphrodite becomes part of a monist system in which lower, denser beings yearn to mix with one another, and higher beings are able to mix with one another 'easier than air with air', whilst also representing the *ultimate* state of mixing, the hermaphroditic holy spirit, containing two mixed sexes in one form. In the Miltonic system, the 'rigid distinction between male and female', which is widely assumed to be the 'Victorian cultural imperative',[29] is repeatedly disrupted and its opposite, the mutability of the sexual body, pervasive in nineteenth-century medical and cultural discourse, is held to be the biological peak.

Bodily boundaries are permeable in sexual and scatological acts in *Paradise Lost*: how then is this material melting, beyond the hermaphrodite, expressed by Swinburne? 'Les Noyades' is one poem in which he deals explicitly with merging and the nature of desire. He describes a form of execution performed during the Reign of Terror, a 'marriage', where men and women were stripped naked and then tied to one another before they were drowned. Swinburne writes that these victims were 'Bound and drowned, slaying two by two, / Maidens and young men, naked and wed.' (11-12) Two figures are to be bound and killed as a pair: 'One rough with labour and red with fight, / And a lady noble by name and face, / Faultless, a maiden, wonderful, white.' (14-16) Whereas the 'lady noble' is distraught, the 'one rough with labour' is overjoyed: it is revealed that he has loved this lady from afar his 'whole life long' (45). The labourer cries in delight 'And I should have held you, and you held me, / As flesh holds flesh, and the soul the soul.' (71-72) Here again is a doubling, which forms a chain ending in the dissolution of dividing boundaries: one repetition lies within the first line and two within the second. There is a quickening of pace as the spaces between the repeated words reduce. The repeated 'held' is separated by three words, though 'you' stands either side of 'and' (which both divides and joins each 'held'); 'flesh' is only kept apart from 'flesh' by 'holds'; finally, there is nothing to separate the 'the soul' from 'the soul'. The labourer's joy at the prospect of being bound to the noblewoman in death is also expressed in a desire for a specifically material melting, recalling Adam's fevered cries of 'Our state cannot be severed'. Swinburne writes: 'I shall drown with her, laughing for love; and

[29] Matus, p. 23.

she / Mix with me, touching me, lips and eyes' (55-56).

It might be argued from the line 'Thy moist limbs melted' in Swinburne's 'Hermaphroditus' that Swinburne's preoccupation with melting takes its basis entirely in Sapphic notions of Eros, and does not refer back (even unknowingly) to Milton's melting. As Anne Carson writes, 'in Greek the act of love is a mingling […] and desire melts the limbs'[30]. The first line of Sappho's fragment 130 has been translated variously by Carson as 'Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me'[31] and 'Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me'[32]: both suggest disorientation and bodily disruption that align with the melting considered above. Where this Greek conception of love is undoubtedly a source for Milton, and a major source for Swinburne, some support for reading Swinburne's use of Greek love as additionally and significantly *Miltonic* can be identified elsewhere in 'Hermaphroditus'. In the poem, Swinburne figures the hermaphrodite as 'a pleasure-house' that 'Love made himself of flesh', which Love in fact 'would not enter in', because 'on the one side sat a man like death' and 'on the other a woman sat like sin' (23-26).[33] Of course, Death and Sin are Satan's offspring in *Paradise Lost*. At Hell's gates, we are told the genealogy of Death and Sin: Sin, like Athena from Zeus, erupted from a gash in Satan's head. Satan then impregnated her, and so she gave birth to Death. Death, overcome with lust, raped Sin and made her pregnant, this time with demonic canine creatures (II. 746-809). If Swinburne is making reference to these children of Satan, as I believe he is, it complicates their embodiment of opposing halves of the hermaphrodite. The implication would be that these two "halves" are particularly difficult to categorize and divide. Milton's Sin is mother, lover, and sibling to Death, and so the complex nature of two genders being joined together in one body is expressed via Miltonic beings whose relation to one another is equally complex. Furthermore, Milton's Sin herself is only half woman: 'The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair, / But ended foul in many a scaly fold' (II. 650-651), so that Satan demands to know 'What thing thou art, thus double-formed' (II. 741). In answer, Sin replies that it was the birth of Death that deformed and divided her: 'Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew / Transformed' (II. 784-785). So that the act that makes her 'double formed' is the very act that assigns her the twofold role of both sexual partner and mother.

[30] Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), p. 7.

[31] Sappho, *If not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, trans. by Anne Carson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Random House, 2002), p. 265.

[32] Sappho, trans. by Carson, *Eros*, p. 3.

[33] Maxwell touches on these lines in her discussion of chiasmus in the poem but omits the relation to Milton, in fact discussing the structure of the lines whilst removing the relevant words: 'Alternatively, a slightly weaker form of the figure [of chiasmus] occurs in sonnet 2, lines 11-12, ('sat . . . man / . . . woman sat') where a simple visual contrast or antithesis is involved.' Maxwell, *Bearing Blindness*, p. 205.

These various births and sexual acts tend towards a violent and sudden breaking of boundaries, in contrast to gentle transpiration. Sin 'sprung' from the side of Satan's head 'op'ning wide', causing him 'sudden miserable pain' (II. 752-758). Likewise, Death's birth is described as particularly painful, as 'breaking violent way' he '[t]ore through' Sin's 'entrails' (II. 782-783). When Sin next gives birth it is to the children of Death, who return to the womb to 'howl and gnaw' her bowels, 'then bursting forth' enact the birth repeatedly (II. 799-800). These expulsions, 'breaking' and 'bursting', all involve an unwanted tearing of flesh.

These ruptures return reconfigured as the target of desire in Swinburne's 'Anactoria', in which he speaks as Sappho, expressing extreme frustration in her desire to consume or assimilate the object of her love, Anactoria:

> O
>
> that I
>
> Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
> Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
> Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee! (129-132)

What Swinburne's Sappho yearns for in 'Anactoria' (to be 'molten into thee') is exactly what Milton's angels enjoy (and what Satan's children cannot enjoy): his angels are 'in possession of a fluidity that could make tasting an act of lovemaking and lovemaking an act of listening, this body has the potential to utterly dissolve boundaries in a moment of mutual interpenetration.'[34] Swinburne's dissolution of boundaries is often figured as an *act of eating*: of consumption and digestion of the beloved other, as for angels, with their bodies 'all tongue' the act of eating is 'an act of lovemaking'. In 'Anactoria' consumption, digestion and eroticism intersect, merging Miltonic and Biblical images:

> 'That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
> Thy breasts like honey! That from face to feet
> Thy body were abolished and consumed,
> And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!' (111-114)

Maxwell writes on this passage that Sappho's desire to consume and entomb Anactoria is 'a cannibalistic act of enclosure which also reminds one of a perverse maternity, as if Sappho might give birth to Anactoria.'[35] This brings us back to the image of Milton's Sin as simultaneously mother, lover and victim of Death. Sections of 'Anactoria' connote Eve's act of eating the forbidden fruit: 'I would earth had thy

[34] deGruy, p. 130.
[35] Maxwell, *Bearing Blindness*, p. 39.

body as fruit to eat, / And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.' (25-26) Serpents reappear several times in the poem, here linked to the act of eating from a tree: 'Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit / Ashes […] underneath / Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth' (237-240). Sappho's frustrated and violent expressions of desire for a sexual act that involves consuming her lover, leading inevitably to her lover's destruction, places her closer to the suffering of Sin, as she is still distanced from (and desirous of) the state described by Adam in his fleshly Biblical expressions of love mentioned above: 'Our state cannot be severed, we are one, / One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself' (IX. 958-959). Sappho desires to be 'One flesh' with Anactoria, but the bodily boundaries that restrict her expressions of love mean that this is only possible through a digestion or assimilation, which equates with destruction: again, in contrast with the ideal 'union of pure with pure' that Milton's angelic beings enjoy.

This obvious enjoyment of merging demonstrates Milton both supplements and surpasses Sapphic desire. Anne Carson writes that 'In experiencing and articulating the melting threat of eros, the Greek poets are presumably also learning something about their own bounded selves through the effort to resist dissolution of those bounds in erotic emotion.'[36] According to Carson, the Greeks perceive Eros as a 'melting *threat'* that provokes resistance. This seems in direct conflict with the Miltonic representation of divine beings as *enjoying* boundary dissolution, and the tortured attitude of Swinburne's Sappho, whose ultimate desire is for this divine (but unachievable) dissolution. As Carson explains it, the threat of Eros for the Greeks comes from the notion that boundary dissolution involves destruction of the self, 'Union would be annihilating.'[37] In Swinburne's 'Anactoria', this destruction of self and other through melting is exactly what Sappho covets. Swinburne's Sappho does not 'resist dissolution': she craves it. In Milton's monist universe the divine beings need not fear self-destruction in dissolution, as the boundaries they break were made to be broken. The Miltonic preoccupation with sexual melting is then differentiated from Eros and *goes beyond it*. In Swinburne's embrace of this melting beyond the Sapphic, he disavows any adherence to a Victorian doctrine of fear of mutability.

This is related to Milton's provision of a system which, again, 'goes beyond' the conflict between abject and aesthetic that Swinburne finds so captivating in Baudelaire. Of Baudelaire, Swinburne wrote that 'even of the loathsomest bodily putrescence and decay, he can make some noble use; pluck out its meaning and secret, even its beauty, in a certain way, from actual carrion'.[38] Jonathan Cullers suggests that what Baudelaire offers (and what is particularly modern about this

[36] Carson, *Eros*, p. 40.
[37] Carson, p. 62.
[38] Swinburne, 'Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*', reprinted in *Swinburne as Critic*, ed. by Clyde K. Hyder (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 30.

offering) is illuminating 'poetry's ability to bring into verse the banal [or] the disgusting […] and give it a poetic function.'[39] Where Baudelaire offers an example of how to find 'beauty' in 'carrion', or nobility in 'the loathsomest bodily putrescence' (in Baudelaire's own words, '*Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas*'[40]) Milton offers more, something aetiological rather than modern: we are confronted with what is 'banal' or 'disgusting' to the modern mind, but in a world without these points of reference. Milton's monistic world involves a prelapsarian state of humanity, and goes so far as to involve the scatological and sexual functions of angels, acts which we would consider 'bodily putrescence' in another form. Milton conceives a state of being for angels and prelapsarian humans in which excretion and sexuality, acts of disorder and boundary dissolution are presented but are *not obscene*. Miltonic angels and prelapsarian humans partake in both erotic acts and excretion via disruption or dissolution of the boundaries of their bodies and far from 'loathsome' it is delightful.

In the second half of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's bodies begin to be clouded with the disgust that comes to be aligned with beauty by the likes of Baudelaire.[41] In contrast to prelapsarian humans, deGruy writes that angels enjoy 'a material existence that is not subject to a hierarchy of bodily configuration'.[42]For postlapsarian humanity this 'hierarchy of bodily configuration' becomes even more pronounced; there is a sense in which excretion and the erotic are suddenly a point of shame and are simultaneously pushed downwards, or hidden. Digestion is no longer easy; as Lehnhof notes, 'Adam's postlapsarian sinfulness is obscenely figured in the "unkindly fumes" of gastric distress that disturb him after he eats the forbidden fruit (IX. 1050).'[43] The postlapsarian transformation of the human body is one that moves away from the divine and toward the comprehensively utilitarian. We become less spiritually 'vital' and more 'organic'. The metamorphosis is a retreat from unity, an intensification of fleshliness, density, and divided organic organization. This is precisely the reversal of God's original plan for humanity (prior to Satan's escape from Hell) for humanity to slowly earn their ascension to heaven and become less

[39] Cullers, 'Introduction', *Fleurs du Mal*, pxxv.
[40] 'In most repugnant objects we find charms', 'To The Reader', pp. 4–5.
[41] Baudelaire himself draws our attention to this contrast between ancient and modern aesthetics when he writes '*Nous avons, il est vrai, nations corrumpues, / Aux peoples anciens des beautés inconnues: / Des visages rongés par les chancres du cœur, / Et comme qui dirait des beautés de langueur*;', or 'It's true, we have in our corrupted states / Beauties unknown to ancient people's tastes: / Visages gnawed by sores of syphilis, / And one might say, beauties of listlessness'. 'I love the thought…', Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil [Les Fleurs du Mal]*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 18–21.
[42] McGowan, p. 126.
[43] Kent R. Lehnhof, 'Scatology and the Sacred in Milton's *Paradise Lost*', *English Literary Renaissance* 37 (2007), pp. 429–449 (p. 439).

dense, light as angels. Instead, after the fall, we have to toil and shit and piss. Mary Douglas writes that 'dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder.'[44] Like evil, then, dirt and the associated shame of excretion arrive alongside *knowledge*. The postlapsarian body attempts to deal with this corporeal dirt and disorder, 'matter out of place,' by imposing order, by assigning specific tasks to specific areas of the body.[45] Douglas writes that 'ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating […] have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience.'[46] After the fall, tasks of excretion and erotic sensation are tidied up, relegated to a spot where they can be shamefully hidden. What is important here, though, is that Milton also presents us, and Swinburne, with an image of these biological functions *before* shame and knowledge, in his conception of the prelapsarian world in which a lack of disorder or knowledge of disorder rendered 'dirt' nonexistent.[47]

So far I have been largely concerned with Milton's metaphysics on a biological level: I now consider more briefly the importance of Milton's poetic language as a vehicle for bodily melting. Boundary dissolution is built into several levels of Milton's poetry, strengthening the sense that "melting" is a particularly Miltonic effect. It appears in forms ranging from the interaction between single letters and syllables to the structure of the entirety of *Paradise Lost.* Joined by its sequel, *Paradise Regained*, it is part of a pairing that melts: Elbert N. S. Thompson writes that 'from the beginning of the epic the two [central stories] are joined. [The] two stories are woven indissolubly together, and a real artistic unity is made possible'.[48]

Dealing with the smaller of these, John Leonard refers to Peck's claim that 'Milton can glide two vowels together without annihilating either one.' He writes:

---

[44] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

[45] Douglas, p. 36.

[46] Douglas, p. 4.

[47] Richard Sieburth links Mary Douglas' anthropology of dirty with Swinburne and Baudelaire in another interesting way. He points out that 'the critical vocabulary deployed against both Swinburne and Baudelaire seems to make one thing clear: in the eyes of many of their contemporaries, their poetry was simply *dirt*' (p. 344). For Sieburth, the dirtiness at the source of criticisms of their poetry was a dirt of disorder which refused to be bounded, a disorder borne out of a refusal 'to observe the segregation of high and low, pure and impure, sacred and obscene' which 'culminates in [a] hermaphroditic epiphany' (pp. 345 and 348). 'The scandal of their poetry is the scandal of dirt: to be neither here nor there, but always somewhere else, always in between' (p. 353). See Sieburth, Richard, 'Poetry and Obscenity: Baudelaire and Swinburne', *Comparative Literature*, 36 (1984), pp. 343–353.

[48] Elbert N. S. Thompson, *Essays on Milton* (1914) as cited by Leonard, p. 293. Effectively this is an attempt to solve the problem of who the hero of *Paradise Lost* is; if it can be read as a weaving together ('indissolubly') of 'two stories', we escape the theological issue of prioritising Satan's fall over that of mankind.

> This practice, known as synaloepha (the Greek word means 'melting together') should not be confused with elision, where one of the vowels is omitted (literally 'crushed out', Latin *elido*) in pronunciation. [...] Peck does not use the term 'synaloepha', but he does talk of Milton's 'melting of syllables': 'As to his elisions, melting of syllables, & using something like an English dactyl foot: he generally cuts off the letter y in the word many, when the next word begins with a vowel (which yet seems not to be cut off, but rather to remain) whereby he gives a particular softness to the foot, & makes it read like an English dactyl' (112). Johnson will think statements of this kind an intolerable contradiction. How can syllables 'remain' when they have been 'cut off'? But Peck is right. 'Melting' syllables do 'remain' even when they yield to the decasyllabic norm. [49]

Leonard is referring here to phrases such as 'so over many a tract' (VI. 76-77) in which 'many a' becomes 'man(y)a'. Here the limits of words, as objects, can be compared to the limits of heavenly bodies: the two can contract, or mix, without being annihilated. It is, perhaps, the boundary itself that is 'cut off', whilst both in entirety 'remain'. To extend this line of inquiry, we might look at a form of ambiguous language that denies limitation, that Milton uses often in *Paradise Lost*, and to which Swinburne has been said to be 'addicted': the pun.[50] Carson writes that 'Like eros, puns flout the edges of things.'[51] She suggests that the pun first conveys the possibility of the dissolution of edges and consequently reveals this as a painful *impossibility*, as we are confronted with the troubling reality that 'Words have edges. So do you.'[52] This highlights an interesting distinction between the effect of written and verbal effects of poetry: Milton's use of synaloepha, experienced verbally, seems an effective way of ridding words of their edges (which removes Carson's painful reminder that melting together is not possible for human lovers) and yet the visual experience of the words on the page confirms their presence. Carson does later add, however, that 'a god's word has no beginning or end. Only a god's desire can reach without lack.'[53] A playful suggestion: perhaps, then, it might be the case that in a poem depicting a monist universe in which all substance involves God in different

[49] John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of* Paradise Lost*, 1667-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 41.
[50] 'Swinburne's poetics of absence, his metonymic dissociation of effect from cause, his addiction to verbal doublings and puns, and his suspension of grammatic and semantic closure…', Sieburth, p. 352.
[51] Carson, p. 35.
[52] Carson, p. 35.
[53] Carson, p. 76.

degrees, the beginning and end of words is less unyielding.

On a larger scale, Milton's companion poems *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* are two separate but indivisible texts, the boundaries of which dissolve and are constantly in dialogue with each other. This dialogue is cyclical; each begins with an address to, or critique of, the other. If the introductory lines can be read as a "looking-back" to the partner poem, the pair must be read in a cycle; because they both begin with this looking-back, neither can claim to be the *first* of the two (the publication dates of the poems are at best hazy). This cyclical motion also complicates identification of the start and end of each poem: as the beginning of *L'Allegro* is concerned directly with *Il Penseroso*, and vice versa, a clear line cannot be cut between the last lines of the "first" and the title of the "second". Eric C. Brown writes that 'the repeated dissolution of these borders creates a sense of instability between the poems' and this, among other factors, contributes 'to the constant flux in which one poem *melts* into the other.'[54] Here, again, we find melting, which Brown figures in terms of desire: 'what each companion dreams, what each desires, will always be the other', and it is 'this desire for the other that makes it impossible for us ever to read either poem absolutely in isolation or to read them simultaneously.'[55]

We might compare the way in which the edges of Milton's poems shade into one another with the way in with Swinburne speaks of the questionable boundaries of poetry. In commentary on Swinburne's verse Maxwell writes:

> Because of the way Swinburne's verse has particular designs on the sensibility of readers, their bodies and minds, there can arise a sense that they are not quite sure what belongs to the poem and what to themselves, a sense of not being quite sure where their identities and those of the poems begin and end.[56]

Here, then, is another way in which Swinburne can be understood as a primary poet of the Victorian sexual body, in the effect of his poetry on the bodies of his audience, which as Maxwell suggests, become in some way indistinguishable from his texts. The physiological effects of Swinburne's poetry, from Gosse's statement that when Swinburne read 'Dolores' to a Pre-Raphaelite audience, 'a number of [the] ladies' were sent 'into an unmistakable state of arousal', to Ruskin's that 'Faustine' 'made me all hot'[57] indicate not only his importance as a writer of the Victorian sexual body inscribed in his poetry, but also on the Victorian bodies that experienced it.

---

[54] Brown, Eric C., '"The Melting Voice Through Mazes Running": The Dissolution of Borders in L'allegro and Il Penseroso', *Milton Studies* 40 (2001), pp. 1–18 (p. 1). My emphasis.
[55] Brown, p. 1.
[56] Catherine Maxwell, *Swinburne* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2006), p. 24.
[57] Sieburth, p. 351.

Both Milton and Swinburne flout the poetry's edges significantly: Milton's poems melt into each other, Swinburne's melt into their audience, and their poetic practices melt into each other. They are connected by their understanding of the body as mutable and permeable, and by the poetic devices and language that they use to conceptually explore this dissolution of bodily boundaries. The last phrase of Milton's metaphor in *Areopagitica*, 'It was from out of the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil as *two twins cleaving together* leapt forth into the world.'[58], might easily be taken for a line from Swinburne. The image of 'two twins cleaving together' recalls that of the men and woman bound and drowned in 'Les Noyades' and directs us from similarities in Milton and Swinburne's poetic towards similarities in words themselves, particularly toward Swinburne's uses of the word 'cleave': 'the flesh that cleaves' ('Anactoria', 9); 'thy lover that must cleave to thee' ('Laus Veneris', 138); 'choose of two loves and cleave unto the best' ('Hermaphroditus', 6); 'the flowers cleave apart' ('A Ballad of Death', 87); 'let not this woman wail and cleave to me' ('Phaedra', 41). This is not to suggest that Swinburne's repeated use of this word is a direct reference to Milton's *Areopagitica* (as 'cleaves' is also used in some translations of Genesis 2:24) but instead that the two are connected by their preoccupation with melting even at a semantic level. The use of 'cleave' itself may be read as an expression of this preoccupation, as it contains antithetical meanings: defined by the *OED* first as 'to part or divide'[59] and second as 'to stick fast or adhere'[60] Indeed, Freud chooses 'cleave' as an example in his essay 'The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words'.[61] Milton's words themselves convey a concern for melting: it is not just the spaces between words, but multiple meanings that melt within words themselves. These opposing meanings of 'cleave' are themselves 'as two [*unidentical*] twins cleaving together.'

The concept of melting (merging, assimilation, unification, 'cleaving together') is 'woven indissolubly' into Milton's words, structures, theology and metaphysics, and is consequently pervasive in Swinburne's poetry. Swinburne's expression of his preoccupation with "melting" is aided by particularly Miltonic images such as the sensual act of eating forbidden fruit, and the complex figures of Death and Sin.

[58] John Milton, 'Areopagitica', in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton,* ed. by William Kerrigan, John Peter Rumrich & Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007), p. 939.
[59] 'Cleave, V.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34105> [accessed 21 November 2013].
[60] 'Cleave, V.2', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34106> [accessed 21 November 2013].
[61] Sigmund Freud, 'The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol XI (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey & Alan Tyson (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 159.

DeGruy writes that 'Milton's angelic body offers access to an unsexed, or indifferently sexed, state of being, to a dizzying array of bodily configurations in which absolutely nothing is forbidden'.[62] This is both the state that Swinburne's Sappho desires, and that his 'Hermaphroditus' embodies. Milton offers a vision of a potential relation between aesthetic and abject which goes beyond that offered by Baudelaire, and which denies a postlapsarian system of 'ordering' and rigidity of boundaries that an anthropological understanding of 'dirt' demands. In Milton's universe boundaries are permeable and mutable in a way that would have attracted Swinburne and fed into his poetic representation of the sexual body. Swinburne's use of a particularly *Miltonic* form of bodily melting demonstrates Milton's previously underestimated importance for Swinburne, Swinburne's sexual bodies, some of the most interesting Victorian poetry has to offer, make clear that mutability and instability of boundaries are vital concepts for an understanding of Victorian sexuality.

[62] deGruy, p. 128.

Bibliography

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Flowers of Evil [Les Fleurs du Mal]*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Brown, Eric C., '"The Melting Voice Through Mazes Running": The Dissolution of Borders in L'allegro and Il Penseroso', *Milton Studies*, 40 (2001), pp. 1–18

Carson, Anne, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998)

Cook, David A., 'The Content and Meaning of Swinburne's "Anactoria"', *Victorian Poetry*, 9 (1971), pp. 77–93

deGruy, Karma, 'Desiring Angels: The Angelic Body in Paradise Lost', *Criticism*, 54 (2012), pp. 117–49

Donnelly, Phillip J., '"Matter" versus Body: The Character of Milton's Monism', *Milton Quarterly*, 33 (1999), pp. 79–85

Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, [1966], 1991)

Fallon, Stephen M., *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991)

Foucault, Michel, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1* trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, [1976], 1998)

Freud, Sigmund, 'The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words [1910]', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol XI (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey & Alan Tyson (London: Vintage, 2001)

Garland, Tony W., 'Brothers in Paradox: Swinburne, Baudelaire, and the Paradox of Sin', *Victorian Poetry*, 47 (2009), pp. 633–645

Gray, Erik Irving, *Milton and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009)

Kranidas, Thomas, 'Adam and Eve in the Garden: A Study of *Paradise Lost*, Book V', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 4 (1964), pp. 71–83

Lehnhof, Kent R., 'Scatology and the Sacred in Milton's *Paradise Lost*', *ENLR English Literary Renaissance*, 37 (2007), pp. 429–49

Leonard, John, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Mason, Michael, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

Matus, Jill L., *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

Maxwell, Catherine, *Swinburne* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2006)

_____, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)

Miller, David M., 'From Delusion to Illumination: A Larger Structure for L'Allegro-Il Penseroso', *PMLA*, 86 (1971), pp. 32–39

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*, ed. by Gordon Teskey (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005)

_____, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. by William Kerrigan, John Peter Rumrich & Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007)

Morgan, Thaïs E., 'Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues: Sex and Ideology', *Victorian Poetry*, 22 (1984), pp. 175–195

Nelson, James G., *The Sublime Puritan: Milton and the Victorians* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963)

Nice, Margaret Morse, 'A Study of the Nesting of Mourning Doves', *The Auk*, 39 (1922), pp. 457–474

Prins, Yopie, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, trans. by Anne Carson (London: Virago, 2003)

Sieburth, Richard, 'Poetry and Obscenity: Baudelaire and Swinburne', *Comparative Literature*, 36 (1984), pp. 343–353

Smith, Lindsay, *Pre-Raphaelitism: Poetry and Painting* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2013)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *Poems and Ballads & Atalanta in Calydon*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (London: Penguin , 2000)

_____, *Swinburne as Critic*, ed. by Clyde K. Hyder (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972)

Wilson, William, 'Algernon Agonistes: "Thalassius," Visionary Strength, and Swinburne's Critique of Arnold's "Sweetness and Light"', *Victorian Poetry*, 19 (1981), pp. 381–395

THE FARMING BODY IN THOMAS HARDY'S *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD*

Sanghee Lee
(Binghamton University, State University of New York)

Abstract
This paper discusses the state of the Victorian agricultural body as assessed and represented in Victorian literature and culture. Examining mid-nineteenth century periodical articles on English farmers and the mid- and late-century legislative reform movements in the military and agricultural sectors, I first demonstrate how Victorians re-configured the English agricultural body in juxtaposition to the military body within the discourse of Victorian heroism. Focusing on issues around the two groups' class, gender, and socio-economic status and on their overlapping roles in national and individual protection, I argue that the Victorian agricultural body worked as a central site to address both cultural anxieties and expectations about the condition of English society in times of national insecurity, brought on by intense international military and economic rivalries. I read Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) as a novel that reflects such contemporary concerns, arguing that Hardy explores the precarious position of the English agricultural body, positioning it as superior to the military hero. I suggest that Hardy in this novel envisions the English agriculturist, despite his susceptibility to changes in his surroundings, as an important Victorian economic body and an ideal heroic model that contributes to the emotional, economic, and moral regeneration of the English nation. Through farming protagonists who take control of both monetary and emotional currencies of agrarian society, Hardy provides a forward-looking vision of English farming life that embraces both stability and progress.

Parliamentary debates on the Enlistment Bill and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in the late 1840s and early 1850s made the Victorian military and farming body, in both its collective and individual senses, objects of public scrutiny.[1] Traditionally, the

[1] In general, I use the term 'body' to refer to actual physical parts and features of fictional characters in Hardy's novel. But when I say 'the agricultural body' and 'the military body', I use them in a sense that articles in mid-century agricultural periodicals like *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette (GCAG)* and *Farmer's Magazine* called tenant-farmers 'the agricultural body' to emphasise their group identity bounded by a common destiny: the much-beset socio-economic conditions and disoriented sensibilities that tenant-farmers and soldiers faced and shared. For the periodicals' usage of 'the agricultural body', see 'The Corn Laws', *GCAG,* (14 Feb 1846), p. 110; C. W. H., *GCAG*, (25 July 1846), p. 505; 'Society for the Protection of Agriculture and British Industry', *Farmer's Magazine*, 15 (Jan. 1847), p. 72. 'The British Farmer' called tenant-farmers 'the most valuable body of agriculturists' (*Farmer's Magazine,* 22:2 (Aug. 1850), p. 92). Pamela Gilbert, in *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004) uses the term 'the social body' as 'a concept increasingly associated with spatial forms

military was regarded as 'one of the great instruments of our national supremacy and pride'.[2] Agriculture was seen as 'the foundation of every other art, business, and profession'.[3] Even in the early 1840s, the idea of English farmers as 'the bone and sinew of the nation' circulated widely.[4] However, revealing a weakened and/or weakening status of the British army and English agriculture towards the mid-nineteenth century, military and agricultural reformation movements unsettled conventional ideas about these bodies as the origin of English stability, power, and prosperity.

The Enlistment Bill of 1847 proposed to filter out unqualified soldiers by limiting the time of service in the Army and altering the promotion system by purchase.[5] It came out of the concerns about the degeneration and contamination of the military body, as some felt the existing military system made 'the Army only the last refuge of an inferior class' and failed to offer soldiers an ideal environment to improve their and the nation's physical and moral conditions.[6] The Repeal of the Corn Laws enforced gradual reductions of the tariff between 1846 and 1849, hoping to lower food prices, which had been kept artificially high with the Importation Act of 1815, and to bring English agriculture out of the current stagnation. Supporters hoped these reforms would make the army and the farming community better prepared for future confrontations, one with international armed forces and the other with price competitions in the age of free trade. Despite the wide difference between the conservatives and the liberals, both were interested in finding a better way to protect English territory/land and the body of the nation and individuals.

---

of knowledge' (p. 4). In my reading of an 1850 *Punch* illustration, I point out contemporaries' topographical understanding of the social body of English tenant-farmers. I also examine soldiers' and farmers' physical, moral, legal, and economic conditions as discussed in the reform debates and periodical articles.

[2] Anon., 'Enlistment', *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) (27 March 1847), p. 193.

[3] Robert James Merrett, 'The Gentleman Farmer in *Emma*: Agrarian Writing and Jane Austen's Cultural Idealism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*77: 2 (Spring 2008), p. 9.

[4] Anon., 'The Corn Exchange', *ILN* (29 Oct. 1842), p. 390.

[5] The Enlistment Bill that this paper is concerned with was proposed as the Army Service Bill between March and May 1847. It was passed as the Limited Enlistment Act of 1847, with the support of the Duke of Wellington, which shortened the length of military service from unlimited to ten years. The purchase was not abolished until 1871. See further discussions of English military reform movements in Hew Strachan, *The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London; New York: Longman, 1980); Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[6] Anon., 'The Enlistment Bill', *ILN* (1 May 1847), p. 278.

A look at some best-known contemporary periodicals, such as the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) and *Punch*, and specialised agricultural periodicals like the *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (*GCAG*) and *Farmer's Magazine,* reveals the Victorians' common concerns, regardless of their political stance and professional knowledge, about how to assess and represent the farming and military body that faced immediate social and legal reforms.[7] Articles and illustrations published in *ILN* and *Punch* juxtaposed images of English soldiers as national heroes or failures. The 1846 and 1847 issues of *ILN* are full of illustrations that highlight the valour and formidable stature of British soldiers: the process of raising the Wellington Statue in London and the portraits of soldiers in wars and military processions certainly invoked the cult of hero-worship in the public mind. Yet, *Punch* in the same years printed a series of illustrations of British soldiers that underscored the inefficiency and incapability of the military body in its failed efforts to protect the nation and its people.[8] The simultaneous circulation of contrasting images about Victorian soldiers as objects of glorification and contempt manifests the conflicted feelings about the British military body that were prevalent within the culture.

Between 1845 and 1847, *ILN* published a series of agricultural paintings that show a harmonised vision of the farming community, where the field labourers and farmers are visualised as idyllic, happy pastoral subjects.[9] Whether they project cultural nostalgia or desire, they certainly conceal contemporary reality – the severe agricultural depression. On the other hand, *Punch* delineated the middle-class tenant-farmers as physically and economically weakened by Corn-Law Repeal, constructing images of effeminate farmers and agriculture under one impending fate of bodily collapse and financial ruin. For instance, an 1850 *Punch* article, 'The Farmer's Story' (Figure 1), touches upon the protectionists' concerns about the 'reduced circumstances' of the tenant-farmer, who wails that he is 'utterly undone'.[10] In a way, this illustration plays down the serious state of the ruined farmer by caricaturing the farmer's body and his agonised verbal exclamations with *Punch*'s signature

[7] I chose *ILN* and *Punch* because they had the largest circulation rate and large middle-class readership in the mid-nineteenth century, and because I believe they both captured and affected the period's most prevalent views on soldiers and farmers. I chose the two leading agricultural periodicals *GCAG* (1841-1900) and *Farmer's Magazine* (1832-1881) as my other principal resources because, with their pronounced neutral position 'in the free-trade and protection struggle', they issued articles that examined the physical, moral, and economic condition of English tenant-farmers from objective perspectives (*GCAG* (Aug 11 1849), p. 505).

[8] A serialised caricature entitled, 'The Brook Green Volunteer', which was published in every 1846 *Punch* issue, makes jokes of soldiers' failed endeavours to perform their social and national duty.

[9] See the *ILN* series 'Agricultural Scenes'.

[10] Anon., 'The Farmer's Story', *Punch*, Vol. 18 (1850), p. 9.

humour. Yet, it evokes the reader's pathos towards the farmer's diminished form and incurs an alarming sense of anomaly in the nation's physical and economic constitution and its founding industry, agriculture. Here, the bankrupt body of a farmer is identified with that of the nation; the map of England with the word 'BANKRUPT' written over it resembles the contour of the weeping farmer sitting on a chair, with his hat dropped on the ground. By calling attention to the similarity between the topographical body of the nation and the individual body, the picture not only highlights the common fate of national and personal economic downfall but also suggests the common structural destiny of the two bodily organisms. Another 1850 *Punch* illustration, entitled 'The Real Unprotected Female' (Figure 2), anthropomorphises agriculture in the person of an old woman. Agriculture is no longer emblematic of the nation's backbone that upholds the healthy, vigorous, young male English farmer. Torn in the battle between the free traders and protectionists, the aged female Agriculture is bewildered and frightened by the two external male forces, revealing her to be the 'real unprotected female'.[11]

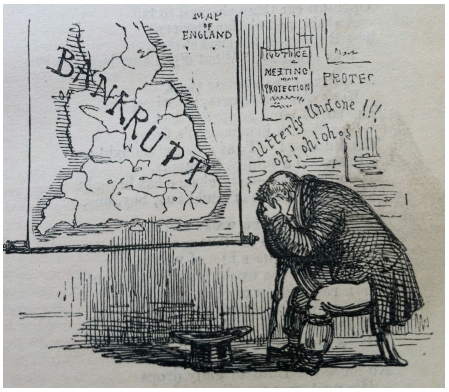
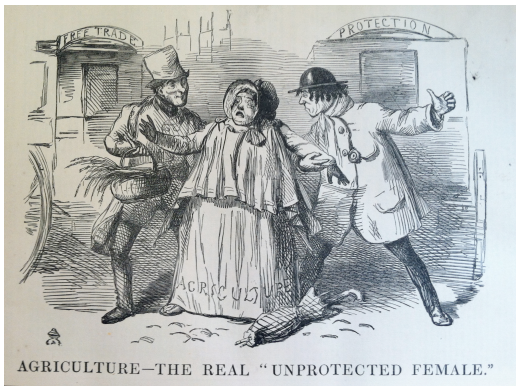


Fig. 1 'The Farmer's Story'



AGRICULTURE—THE REAL "UNPROTECTED FEMALE."
Fig. 2 'The Real Unprotected Female'

Also concerned with examining the state of the English farming body affected by the Repeal, *GCAG* and *Farmer's Magazine* employed a patriotic rhetoric that stresses the common corporeality and destiny of tenant-farmers, asserting that the condition of 'the agricultural body' affects 'our national, no less than our individual, welfare'.[12] Yet, they maintain a neutral tone in acknowledging British agriculture and the tenant-farmer as the nation's body to be preserved. Whilst they understand that protectionists 'desire the national defence' through the Corn Laws and encourage 'any attempt to rouse the spirit of the people in patriotic self-defence', they also

[11] Anon., 'The Real Unprotected Female', *Punch,* Vol. 18 (1850), p. 35.
[12] 'The Corn Laws', *GCAG* (14 Feb 1846), p. 110; 'Whatever may be the feelings', *GCAG* (25 July 1846), p. 505; 'Prospects of Farming', *GCAG* (25 Nov. 1848), p. 787.

appreciate free-traders' visions as a way to strengthen farmers' competitiveness in the international market.[13]

Examining the military and farming body through these two reform movements is important because both sectors shared human capital. In the nineteenth century, agricultural labourers were often metamorphosed into the military body, and the common soldiers, without capital and connections, often went back to agricultural life after discharge. Thus, it makes sense to think about how these bodies mattered to the Victorian public: economic problems that both the agricultural and military body raised represent the nation's concerns about, and interest in, envisioning an ideal economic body as the nation's heroic model.

Attention to the farming body is particularly important after the Repeal, as it pushed farmers to adopt a capitalist mode of business, which Victorians felt often turned benevolent farmers into inhumane and machine/profit-centred businessmen.[14] Under the new economic paradigm, however, the culture also perceived the farming body as an ideal body that could nourish the nation physically, morally, and financially. An 1842 *ILN* article, 'British Agriculture', discusses 'an exulting approval of the value, the importance, and the social benefit of' agriculture.[15] In another *ILN* article that same year, "The Roast Beef of Old England', the writer asserts how agricultural success works in tandem with military victory in the nation, remarking that 'the flourishing agriculture of happy England' results in 'the bone and sinew of her strength and energy in war'.[16]

This rhetoric, which emphasises the symbiotic relationship of the two sectors and bodies, coincides with the rise of the tenant-farmer's social status in the second half of the nineteenth century. It accompanied a series of legislations for agricultural reform, which gradually elevated the tenant-farmer from a subjected to an independent being.[17] Along with the ongoing debates about expanding the tenant's

[13] *GCAG* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 569.

[14] In 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (1883), *Thomas Hardy's The Dorsetshire Labourer and Wessex*,. ed. by Roger Lowman, *Studies in British Literature*, Vol. 96 (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 51-74, Hardy introduces the profit-centred attitudes of the tenant-farmer class who 'takes strictly commercial views of his man and cannot afford to waste a penny on sentimental considerations' (p. 66).

[15] Anon., 'British Agriculture', *ILN* (16 July 1842), p. 145.

[16] Anon., 'The Roast Beef of Old England', *ILN* (10 Dec. 1842), p. 481.

[17] Unlike yeomen whose farms 'were their own, or directly under their control', tenant-farmers had a limited control in their use of rented farms (quoted in Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 75). With a series of agricultural legislative reforms from 1851 to 1883, however, 'landlords found themselves subject to their tenants' claims' and the farmers' 'economic importance' to the landowners increased. See Edward Bujak, *England's Rural Realms:*

rights in Parliament, tenant-farmers themselves made continuing efforts to promote their own image and position in society. For example, leading Victorian farmers like James Caird and Phillip Pusey endeavoured to disseminate positive images of farmers as an innovative, scientific, and economically driven reasonable businessman and to dispel the conventional pastoral idea of farmers as archaic and ignorant.[18] *GCAG* and *Farmer's Magazine* diffused the idea of agriculture as 'a practical subject' and a 'business' and saw 'enterprising agriculturists' as playing essential roles in 'set[ting] a pattern of economy' with farm management.[19]

On the other hand, despite its continual significance for colonial expansion, the military body was losing its conventional popularity as a "national hero" figure with the general public, particularly by causing a constant economic burden to the nation. Like the 1847 reform, a series of army reforms between 1868 and 1874 aimed to effect 'a very cheap and most effectual' running of the army with 'a better class of recruit'.[20] While these reforms helped the military expenditure to be 'kept within tolerable limits' in the early 1870s, 'the cost of the army had risen' afterwards, as investigated by an 1887 Select Committee.[21] The dispersal of the army under the Localization Act of 1872 'increased the costs of holding military manoeuvres' in the following years.[22] In addition, undergoing a chronic shortage of recruitment at all levels, the British Army had to consider raising pension rates and salaries to improve both qualitative and quantitative conditions of the army.

As shown in the two debates that took place simultaneously, what was at stake for the nation was to find ways of improving farmers' and soldiers' economically,

---

Landholding and the Agricultural Revolution (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 139; p. 127.

[18] Both Caird and Pusey were founding members of, and main contributors to, the *Journal of Agricultural Society of England*. Caird was the 'main publicist' of high farming in the mid-century (Richard Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6). Pusey, starting his career as a farmer, rose to become an MP for Berkshire in 1835 until 1852 (Martins, p. 15). See more discussions of English farmers' social position in Susanna Wade Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720 to 1870* (Macclesfield, Cheshire, U.K.: Windgather Press, 2004).

[19] *GCAG*, 20 Oct. 1849, p. 665; 'English Farmers vs. Foreign Farmers', *GCAG* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 571.

[20] For example, with the Army Enlistment Act of 1870 and the Army Regulation Act of 1871, the service term was shortened to seven years and the number of overseas soldiers decreased from 50,000 to 24,291, from which the government expected to keep the army young and have a reduced bill for pensions. See Strachan, pp. 70-72; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 4.

[21] Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 199; *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 168.

[22] Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 200.

morally, and physically deteriorated bodies, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Periodical articles' attention to these two groups indicate the endeavours that contemporary social critics undertook to re-assess and re-configure the social body of the Victorian soldiers and farmers, in order to envision an ideal Victorian body that would contribute to overcoming the nation's ills. The desire to make the farming and military body the basis of a fit and competent national body in both physical and economic senses underscores Victorians' need to merge stability and progress in a time of economic and cultural change.

Changing Agricultural Society and Competing Heroic Models in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far from the Madding Crowd is one of the few Victorian novels where main characters and events are largely free from family dramas of kinship and inheritance. Except for the inheritance plot in the beginning of the novel that initiates Bathsheba's career as a woman farmer, the idea of family connection or complication is insignificant not only to the narrative progress but also to character development. It is peculiar in a novel of this period, which takes place in an agricultural milieu, to draw more attention to individual relationships than familial ones. There is no mention of Gabriel Oak's and Farmer Boldwood's origins or family backgrounds and kinship ties. Although their origins are known among the townspeople, Sergeant Troy and Bathsheba Everdene are the sole reminders of their respective families.

Just as the central form of the agricultural industry has changed from family farming to capitalist farming by the mid-nineteenth century, the novel calls attention to the prevalence of the modern type of human relationship in a Victorian society where economic relationships rather than familiar/familial ties predominate even in agricultural society.[23] Accordingly, the novel delves into the human connections rooted in private emotional ties and economic bonds. All of the novel's events are examined in economic terms, and most of the characters are positioned in economic relationships, both literal and metaphorical, such as that of debtor and creditor, payer and paid, or investor and invested, etc.

Demonstrating the shift of cultural focus toward individuals' economic relationships, Hardy invites readers to turn their attention to the economic bodies and roles of his characters. Setting the novel in times when society was concerned about

[23] For more about the growth of English capitalist farms, see Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Family Farms and Capitalist Farms in mid nineteenth-century England', *The Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 53, no. 2 (2005), pp. 158-191.

the precarious conditions of agrarian and military communities, Hardy particularly probes economic aptitudes and relations of the farming and military characters – Frank Troy and Gabriel Oak – through their life-paths and relationships with Bathsheba to envision who embodies a heroic English body. As John Peck has pointed out, Hardy insightfully captures the 'military resurgence' and 'changes in representing the military' since the mid Victorian period through his novels such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), and *The Dynasts* (1904).[24] While Peck argues that Hardy revises a negative stereotype of Victorian soldiers of lower class, uneducated, and ungentlemanly backgrounds, I do not believe we can generalise that Hardy's military figures are inclined to positive descriptions and receptions. Given the conflicted feelings and visions toward the military and the agriculturist captured in contemporary periodicals, I instead argue that, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy re-evaluates the state of Victorian military heroes through Sergeant Troy by highlighting his inability to nourish the nation. And I suggest that Hardy brings in the newly emerged capitalist agriculturist Gabriel Oak as an alternative hero to replace the conventional soldier-hero as pillar of Victorian society.

In fact, Peck overlooks the narrative movement away from military heroism to the economic heroism of the English farmer. Earlier in the novel, by juxtaposing the demand of military recruitment and Oak's desperate need to get a job, the narrator almost envisions Oak's future in the military path:

> In the morning a regiment of cavalry had left the town, and a sergeant and his party had been beating up for recruits through the four streets. As the end of the day drew on, and he found himself not hired, Gabriel almost wished that he had joined them, and gone off to serve his country (p. 43).[25]

Making Gabriel Oak veer away from the path of soldiering at the country fair and wander to a neighbouring town for another agricultural job, however, the narrative forecloses the possibility of Oak's recovering the glorious past of a military career and heroism. Instead, it opens a way to configure commercial farming as an alternative path for Oak to achieve heroism as an agricultural businessman. Registering the changes in the Victorian heroic discourse on the two groups, Hardy shows how the society was giving more weight to the rise of economic heroism as

[24] John Peck, *War, the Army, and Victorian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 115.

[25] Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* [1874] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 43. All subsequent references are to this edition.

envisioned by the English farmer's economic contribution and dismissing conventional military heroism as causing a national burden in both an economic and moral sense.

The Aesthetic and Economic Value of the English Farmer

Driven by his concern with what is at stake in defining English farmers' social, economic, and cultural identity in relation to Victorian society as a whole, Hardy searches for proper ways to determine Farmer Oak's value.[26] For example, the narrator notes different ways of valuing Oak, from 'the mental picture formed by his neighbours in imagining him' to how people tend to 'depend for his valuation upon his appearance than upon' his other capacities (p. 9; p. 10). In particular, when a 'dispute' arises about 'a difference concerning twopence between the persons with the wagon and the man at the toll-bar', the narrator draws the reader's attention to the question of how to rate aesthetic and economic values of the English farmer's body. When Oak gives out twopence to let Bathsheba pass through, he acts according to his own theory of money's worth: 'threepence had a definite value as money – it was an appreciable infringement on a day's wages' but 'there was something in the tone of twopence remarkably insignificant' (p. 12; 13). But Oak's failure to understand the money's worth from the other's perspective initiates a troubled relationship between him and Bathsheba. Being a prospering tenant-farmer, Oak makes a comparative evaluation of twopence as insignificant, but for Bathsheba it is an important sum. The reduced circumstance of Bathsheba who 'was going to be a governess once' forced her to 'stay with her aunt for my bare sustenance', she 'must help' Mrs. Hurst, who is not 'rich enough to pay a man to do' manual works (p. 32; p. 19; p. 36).

Although Oak saves her trouble, Bathsheba shows no signs of gratitude to Oak. As the narrator says, 'she might have looked her thanks to Gabriel on a minute scale, but she did not speak them: more probably she felt none, for in gaining her a passage he had lost her her point, and we know how women take a favour of that kind' (p. 13). By depriving Bathsheba of an opportunity to solve the problem independently and thus to prove herself her own mistress, Oak hurt her sense of pride and agency. At the same time, the narrator shows that there is another crucial reason for Bathsheba's ungrateful reaction other than her annoyance at Oak's monetary interference. Drawing particular attention to Oak's physical appearance, the narrator

[26] For the novel's interest in discussing the right value of the characters and Gabriel Oak's appreciation of 'the value of propriety', see Donald Eastman, 'Time and Propriety in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Interpretations*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (1978), pp. 20-33.

implies that Bathsheba's aesthetic interpretation of his body resulted in her ingratitude. When the conflict at the gate is resolved, the narrator immediately comments on Oak's appearance:

> Gabriel's features adhered throughout their form so exactly to the middle line between the beauty of St John and the ugliness of Judas Iscariot as represented in a window of the church he attended, that not a single lineament could be selected and called worthy either of distinction or notoriety. The red jacketed and dark haired maiden seemed to think so too, for she carelessly glanced over him and told her man to drive on (p. 13).

Here, the narrator emphasizes the connection between Bathsheba's disregard of Oak's economic act and his physical body, which is neither aesthetically pleasant nor repulsive. The impossibility of determining the aesthetic value of Oak's body in specific terms causes Bathsheba to relegate Oak's philanthropic act of offering money freely – his economic chivalry and prominence – to a meaningless act that is not worthy of repayment, either in money or words.

Although Oak's economic superiority over Bathsheba is obscured by her aesthetic depreciation of his external features, Oak's body is dynamic, open to transformations as it moves between the poles of gain/production and loss/degeneration. As examined earlier in this paper, the farming body could be an agent of abundance and nourishment, or it could be emblematic of poverty and failure. Farmers in this novel are susceptible to external circumstances and changes, as the degree of their success is considerably affected by the difficulties in forecasting meteorological conditions and the resulting uncertainties of annual agricultural production. Fluctuations of Oak's economic standing in agricultural society are most apparently projected by the way he keeps changing his clothes in a job fair, in order to present himself in a number of different personae – from bailey to shepherd – to present his economic value to potential buyers of his labour power.[27] Failing to gain any position during the fair and losing all of his assets, Oak experiences an utter diminishment of his masculinity, as he is divested of his social and economic position. Hidden in someone's carriage and transported to where he has no

[27] Simon Gatrell discusses the role of dress as indicating the psychological state of Hardy's characters' in 'Reading Hardy through Dress'*, A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Keith Wilson (Malden, MA; Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 178-193.

connection right after the fair in his search for basic means to sustain his life, Oak literally becomes nobody who is worth nothing.[28]

Soon after his socio-economic fall, Oak gains a position as a shepherd at Bathsheba's farm. There, he finds numerous chances to elevate his social and financial position. Hardy recognises the progressive potential of Oak's farming body, characterising it as the epitome of 'the world's health and vigour' and that of economic productivity and sensibility (p. 107). As the narrator acknowledges, Oak's 'special power' as a farmer is assessed not only 'morally, physically, and mentally' but also by his economic potential and competence: 'the basis of [Oak's] beauty' derives from his 'motions' and bodily 'fitness' for farm work (p. 16). Highlighting Oak's physical and economic contribution to the farm, Hardy particularly recasts Oak in the image of an ideal masculine body and emphasises his irreplaceable value in the community. The language that describes Oak who saves the farm from all kinds of physical and economic ruin invokes an unknown great military hero who did a 'great service' to the nation at war (p. 50). For example, Oak's fight with fire is like a battle with an enemy, as the narrator delineates the fire in shapes of living organisms such as 'knots of red worms' and 'fiery faces, tongues hanging from lips, glaring eyes, and other impish forms' (p. 48). Oak's excellence in his physical strength and leadership becomes more apparent, especially when it is compared to the farm labourers' physical and mental weaknesses that cause 'confusion' and 'commotion' (p. 49). Bathsheba, her maid, and the townsfolk notice the most conspicuous feat of Oak's physical movements and actions at a distance with admiration and awe, while watching Oak 'digging in his feet' in the fire and 'clamber[ing] up' and 'beat[ing] off the fiery fragments' (p. 49). People regard Oak, 'that bold shepherd up there', as their hero whose body is now most desired in Bathsheba's farm: Bathsheba, without knowing the shepherd's true identity, 'wish[es] he was shepherd here' (p. 50).

It is on the stormy day when the narrator, using a military analogy, specifically pictures Oak as a hero – a great saviour and protector of Bathsheba and her territory. The storm paralleled to a 'war' steals in with 'the lightning […] gleamed in the heavens like a mailed army' (p. 243; p. 245). While Troy taunts Oak's warning of a disastrous turn in the weather and indulges in revelry, Oak regards all signs of the impending storm as those of an invading enemy. Accurately measuring distances to each stack of grains, Oak 'mount[s]' up and down piles and 'protect the barley' with 'systematic thatching' (p. 243). 'Operating' methodical plans, Oak approaches one barn after another as if encroaching upon the enemy's territory in military operations

[28] For a discussion of the '(re-)aligments of gender and power,' see Linda Shires, 'Narrative, Gender and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Novel* (Winter 1991), pp. 162-177.

with utmost care: 'Driving in spars at any point and on any system inch by inch he covered more and more safely from ruin this distracting impersonation of seven hundred pounds' (p. 250). Being in an economic battle as well as a battle with nature and for love, Oak succeeds in minimising the economic loss of his lover's property. When Bathsheba witnesses Oak faithfully undertaking his duty at the farm *vis-à-vis* Troy's utter neglect, she comes to highly regard Oak's manliness and treat him as her true hero, unlike her first ingratitude to him in saving her from economic trouble at the tollgate.

During this endeavour, the spectre of a large amount of money occupies Oak's soul and mind. Yet, differentiating Oak from mean, selfish, deceiving capitalist farmers, the narrator describes a complete, manly Englishman who cares for the well-being of his neighbours with paternal attention despite his disappointment in love. He only thinks of the impact of lost money on a communal level: 'that of necessary food for man and beast – should the risk be run of deteriorating this bulk of corn to less than half its value because of the instability of a woman? "Never if I can prevent it!" said Gabriel' (p. 240). More concerned with protecting the resources of the community than Troy, Oak makes outstanding 'advancement' in agricultural business (p. 322). Although Oak was lowered to be Bathsheba's shepherd from a farmer who owns 'about a hundred' acres, years of devoted hard work at her farm promotes him to manage 'two thousand acres' of both Boldwood's and Bathsheba's farm (p. 22; p. 323).[29] Attending to the farm 'as if the crops all belonged to him', Oak gains a reputation as a 'trustworthy man' and establishes himself as a successful self-managing farmer (p. 323).

Unrequited love from Bathsheba does not divert Oak from his responsibilities as a farmer, which augments his importance in the narrative as an agricultural hero toward the end of the novel. However, the same love dejection results in the degeneration of another farming character in the novel, Farmer Boldwood: from a respected farmer to a failing farmer and a jealous murderer. Despairing of his romantic failure, Boldwood utterly gives up attending to his farm and causes a dismantling of his farm produce/property, which is a 'preposterous' behaviour for a farmer (p. 251). As shown in the changes of his bodily features such as his 'immobility,' impassiveness and a depressed/dejected look, he turns his own person into an 'abnormal' and enervated man (p. 235; p. 252). 'Liv[ing] secluded and inactive', Boldwood wishes 'ultimately to retire' and remain Oak's 'sleeping partner'

[29] 'The average size of a farm rented by a farmer in nineteenth-century Britain was 110 acres' (Cook, p. 235). Bernard A. Cook, 'Agriculture', in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. by J. Don Vann & Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Buffalo; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 235-248.

(p. 322; p. 254). Dismissing the vision of a good farmer in Bolwood, the novel reinforces Oak's value as a good, reliable farmer and lover who ends up owning a large portion of Boldwood's estate through partnership and Bathsheba's property through marriage. With this upward economic movement, Oak recovers his masculinity and social position as an invaluable, enterprising agriculturist who becomes a notable figure in the mid-century. Making Gabriel Oak's body symbolic of economic reliability, competency, and progress as well as emotional and physical resilience, the novel positions the farming protagonist as an English hero – and the significance of this body has been neglected in the scholarship of Victorian realist novels.

Purging Economic Parasitism and Degeneration of the English Soldier

Demonstrating unruly tendencies of Troy's economic and romantic behaviours, Hardy makes him an anti-hero of the novel and the agricultural community. His fate implies the deadly future of morally degenerate, non-productive, and non-economic English military bodies.[30] From the beginning of the novel, Troy shows a lack of economic activity/sense, preferring the pursuit of pleasure. With his light-hearted propensities, Troy is easily drawn to what appears outwardly over intrinsic value and the novel shows how problematic such an attitude is.[31] In Troy's and Bathsheba's first chance meeting one night at the fir plantation, Bathsheba is, literally and figuratively, ensnared in Troy's dissipated behaviours, which simultaneously disgust and interest her. Unable to move by Troy's trick of 'hooking' her dress to his 'spur', Bathsheba unwillingly gives Troy chances to study her body, and he continuously compliments Bathsheba for 'the sight of such a beautiful face' (pp. 162-163). His obsession with a woman's exterior features suggests his moral weaknesses towards women whom he tries to capture with his 'power of flattery' whenever possible (p. 167).

As he keeps trading his love objects for a better deal, Troy knows how and when to gain the most advantageous position in romantic relationships. Although he

[30] For a discussion of the novel's 'disciplinary force' 'on exposed and vulnerable bodies of Mr. Boldwood and Troy', see Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Invoking Foucault, Nemesvari shows how *FFMC* reveals 'changing attitudes towards the body' (p. 119).

[31] Troy's thoughtless gift of his family watch to Bathsheba is another indication of his inability to appreciate the true value of his long-held personal possession (the only physical remnant that marks his noble lineage) over what currently attracts him: Bathsheba.

loved Fanny Robin enough to want to marry her, Bathsheba erases his interest in Fanny during his stay in Weatherbury. His timely intervention to Boldwood's affair with Bathsheba lets him snatch Boldwood's chances. His associations with Bathsheba in Bath induce her surrender, by making her anxious to possess him as her own only due to his attractiveness to other women. His tendency to go for more "profitable" relationships leads Bathsheba to curb her sense of self-esteem as a woman and to marry him out of jealousy. Troy makes desired profit out of his marriage to Bathsheba, as Bathsheba pays to discharge him from the army and he becomes the nominal owner of her property.

Fitting the narratorial analogy of Troy to 'a Corinthian' who borrows tactics of 'other men's gallantries' to lure a woman and takes advantage from it, Troy is indeed a 'profligate idler', a 'shameless, brazen-faced' person, to use OED definitions. Hardy's invocation of biblical Corinthians, who indulged in licentious and sacrilegious acts of idol worship, sexual immorality and civil violations, mirrors Troy's wantonness and promiscuity. As shown in his diversions to gambling and luxuries, Troy turns out to be an overtly wasting man – not a suitable man to be a husband and master of the flourishing female farmer. His flirtations and sexual intimacies with Bathsheba and Fanny ruin the life of the two women: Bathsheba, although in legal marriage, agonizes over her unfaithful spouse and Fanny, who bears his child out of wedlock, cannot live as her former self and returns to Weatherbury as a dead body.

Whilst revealing Troy's serious moral defects through his heterosexual relationships, the novel simultaneously weighs the insignificance of his economic and aesthetic values, which unfolds in his role as a soldier. Not to mention his frequent leave and pleasure visits, Troy's career as a sergeant in the dragoons reveals the performative nature of the contemporary military profession that gave more emphasis on soldiers' 'military display'.[32] Looking at Troy's sword-practice, the narrator casts doubt on the soldier's conventional role in the protection of the nation and its people's physical and economic body: the visual effect of what Troy "performs" as a military duty fails to manifest the masculine vigour of English soldiers and reduces it to an ordinary activity.

Troy's sword show heightens the aesthetic value of his body and movement, as evinced in the precision and 'dexterity' of his movement that is beautifully controlled: 'checking the extension a thousandth of an inch short of your surface' with 'his lips closed in sustained effort' and 'with 'just enough rule to regulate

[32] Susan Walton, *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) p. 38.

instinct and yet not to fetter it' (p. 184; p. 183; p. 182).[33] Just as Troy's sword that 'never errs' looks 'like a living thing' to Bathsheba, the novel envisions Troy and the sword moving in cohesion as one spectacular body (p. 185; p. 181). But the narrative makes clear that his sword skills have nothing to do with producing any functional value for the nation and people, certainly not in preparation for future battles. It is performed to satisfy Bathsheba's curiosity and later to earn money in his theatrical career. This scene is particularly interesting in that Troy explains the positions of his sword-practice in terms that invoke a farmer's farming motions. He instructs Bathsheba in motions of 'cuts and thrusts' to follow him, 'as if you were sowing your corn […] hedging […] reaping […] threshing' (p. 182). In Troy's explanation, the 'strange and glorious performance of the sword-exercise' loses its glamour as something that only highly skilled soldiers can do, and it becomes familiarised as an act of a farmer's daily routine motions, both to Bathsheba and the reader (p. 180). Even a novice like Bathsheba is likely to imitate, and ultimately master, this blended formulation of the agricultural and military with some practice at the farm.

The use of an agricultural analogy for Troy's sword-exercise makes a stark contrast to the fact that Oak's agricultural role, as explained earlier, is often perceived in a military analogy which exalts Oak's disciplined masculine body. Oak's preparations for sheep shearing are pictured as those of warrior's at 'an armoury previous to a campaign' when 'peace and war kiss each other at their hours of preparation, sickles, scythes, shears and pruning-hooks mingling with swords, bayonets and lances in their common necessity for point and edge' (p. 131). Oak's working postures, observed by Bathsheba, with 'his figure slightly bent, the weight of his body thrown over on the shears, and his head balanced sideways' remind the narrator of 'Eros […] in the act of sharpening his arrows' to save Psyche from troubles (p. 131). Oak's worthiness is written into the image of him as a soldier before war and as his lover's protector and underwritten by the narratorial construction of the correlation between agriculture and soldiery.

Even after he leaves the military and becomes master of Bathsheba's farm, Troy continues his squandering behaviour and keeps identifying with the military, which exacerbates his moral and economic decline as well as the farm's. To officially announce his new mastership, Troy throws a festive supper where a fiddler strikes a tune, called 'The Soldier's Joy', as 'the right and proper thing' for 'there being a

[33] For the sexual implication of this scene, see Daryl Ogden, 'Bathsheba's Visual Estate: Female Spectatorship in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 23:1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 1-15. Other critics such as Nemesvari have read this scene as indicating Troy's hyper-masculinity as he uses his phallic power over Bathsheba.

gallant soldier married into the farm' (p. 237). Although he no longer belongs to the army, the ex-sergeant resists fully transforming into a farmer: 'for though I have purchased my discharge from Her Most Gracious Majesty's regiment of Cavalry, the 11th Dragoon Guards, to attend to the new duties awaiting me here, I shall continue a soldier in spirit and feeling as long as I live' (p. 237). His clinging to the spirit and feeling of the English soldier indicates his unfitness for the new agricultural community that requires rigorous discipline and work to promote economic and technological advancement.

Keeping soldierly manners and neglecting Bathsheba's farm, Troy is a financial drain on Bathsheba: he constantly asks for money from Bathsheba for as betting on the horses and secretly supporting Fanny. Because he has no resources of his own, he has to keep soliciting, subjecting himself to Bathsheba's monetary power and suppressing his pride to get what he wants, marking him as effeminate and enervated. Begging and deceiving, he is an undesirable and unwanted body in their society as a result of his economic and moral depravity and perversion. Calling him 'a scoundrel' and 'a needy adventurer', the farm labourers wish Troy was 'dead' (p. 365). As one farm labourer says, 'I wish Troy was in – . Well, God forgive me for such a wish! [...] Nothing has prospered in Weatherbury since he came here' (p. 360). Troy, utterly 'beholden for food and lodging' to Bathsheba, becomes an unmanly man, epitomising economic parasitism, reckless consumption, and non-productivity (p. 330).

The arrival of Fanny's dead body at the farm shatters the foundation of Troy's and Bathsheba's marriage. The ensuing news of his drowning and presumed death makes Bathsheba an assumed widow, returning her to the marriage market. Bathsheba's status change from Troy's property to a potentially "re-sellable" object increases her value, still much desired and sought after by Boldwood and Oak. However, as if summarising his life path as a series of performances, Troy returns to a neighbouring town to Weatherbury as a member of a travelling theatre company, and again he tries to get the best deal out of his marriage but to no avail. When he happens to spot Bathsheba amongst the audience at one of his performances, the first thought that comes to Troy's mind is the comfortable life that could be secured by her side. By reclaiming his position as Bathsheba's legal husband, Troy can recover his social and economic position. But it is certain that his return would not promise any bliss to Bathsheba or profits to her farm. The consequences of his pleasure-seeking body do not suit the economy of the farming life. Moreover, finding and acting in the right moment is as critical to the success of love affairs as it is to the farming business. Yet, showing up at the worst possible moment, the Christmas night when Boldwood was planning his engagement to Bathsheba, Troy induces Boldwood's

deathly rage and the narrative escapes from its economic and romantic dead-end by getting rid of Troy. With the incarceration of Boldwood for the murder of Troy, the novel eliminates the two men who are emblematic of bodily and economic degeneration.[34]

Conclusion

As Oak becomes an economic success at the end and ultimately wins his final prize, Bathsheba, from Troy, the reader is left with a more progressive vision of the Victorian farming body as the heroic masculine body of the nation that promotes communal and national prosperity. On the other hand, the military figure Troy, who epitomises an old masculine ideal of muscular strength and martial display fails as a protagonist. With the demise and expulsion of the soldier, the novel reflects how the culture became less appreciative of military/muscular manliness; and it endorses the heroic role of the English farmer who contributes to society's economic stability and progress. As such, *Far from the Madding Crowd* values the Victorian farming body for its potential to both protect and improve the nation and people, and Hardy supports economic heroism as a new paradigm for the discourse of Victorian heroism and the narrative structure of the realist novel.

[34] I do not have time to pursue the point in this essay, but I would like to point out that the novel also positions Bathsheba as a new kind of female agricultural hero whose growth is achieved through economic education. Learning the centrality of economic responsibility in romantic and commercial affairs, she becomes an economic heroine: a reasonable, careful manager of her money and life.

Bibliography

Anon., *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (11 Aug. 1849), p. 505

Anon., *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 569

Anon., *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (20 Oct. 1849), p. 665

Anon., 'British Agriculture', *Illustrated London News* (16 July 1842), p. 145

Anon., 'The British Farmer', *Farmer's Magazine,* 22:2 (Aug. 1850), p. 90-92

Anon., 'The Corn Exchange', *Illustrated London News* (29 Oct. 1842), p. 390

Anon., 'The Corn Laws' *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (14 Feb. 1846), p. 110

Anon., 'English Farmers vs. Foreign Farmers', *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 571

Anon., 'Enlistment', *Illustrated London News* (27 March 1847), pp. 193-194

Anon., 'The Enlistment Bill', *Illustrated London News* (1 May 1847) p. 278

Anon., 'The Farmer's Story', *Punch*, Vol. 18 (January to June 1850), p. 9

Anon., 'Prospects of Farming' *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (25 Nov. 1848), p. 787

Anon., 'The Real Unprotected Female', *Punch,* Vol. 18 (January to June 1850), p. 35

Anon., 'The Roast Beef of Old England', *Illustrated London News* (10 Dec. 1842), p. 481

Anon., 'Society for the Protection of Agriculture and British Industry', *Farmer's Magazine*, 15:1 (Jan 1847), pp. 72-73

Anon., 'Whatever may be the feelings' *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (25 July 1846), p. 505

Allen, Robert, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

Bujak, Edward, *England's Rural Realms: Landholding and the Agricultural Revolution* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007)

Carlisle, Janice. *Picturing Reform in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Cook, Bernard A, 'Agriculture', *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society,* ed. by J. Don Vann & Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Buffalo; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 235-248

C. W. H., *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (25 July 1846), p. 505

Eastman, Donald, 'Time and Propriety in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Interpretations*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (1978), pp. 20-33

Gatrell, Simon, 'Reading Hardy through Dress'*, A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Keith Wilson (Malden, MA; Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 178-193

Gilbert, Pamela, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004)

Hardy, Thomas, 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', *Thomas Hardy's The Dorsetshire Labourer and Wessex*, ed. by Roger Lowman, *Studies in British Literature*, Vol. 96, (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 51-74

_____, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Martins, Susanna Wade, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720 to 1870* (Macclesfield, Cheshire, U.K.: Windgather Press, 2004)

Merrett, Robert James, 'The Gentleman Farmer in Emma: Agrarian Writing and Jane Austen's Cultural Idealism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 77:2, (Spring 2008), pp. 711-737

Nemesvari, Richard, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Ogden, Daryl, 'Bathsheba's Visual Estate: Female Spectatorship in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 23:1 (Winter 1993), pp. 1-15

Peck, John, *War, the Army, and Victorian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998)

Perren, Richard, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Shaw-Taylor, Leigh, 'Family Farms and Capitalist Farms in mid nineteenth-century England', *The Agricultural History Review*, 53: 2 (2005), pp. 158-191

Shires, Linda M, 'Narrative, Gender and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Novel* (Winter 1991), pp. 162-177

Spiers, Edward, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London; New York: Longman, 1980)

_____, *The Late Victorian Army*, 1868-1902 (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1992)

Strachan, Hew, *The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

Walton, Susan. *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010)

LEAKY BODIES: MASCULINITY, NARRATIVE AND IMPERIAL DECAY IN RICHARD MARSH'S *THE BEETLE*

Leslie Allin
(University of Guelph)

Abstract

While Richard Marsh's *fin-de-siècle* gothic novel has most frequently been read in contemporary scholarship as a work that seeks to recuperate threatened imperial masculinity, this article argues that *The Beetle* works to subvert British representations of imperial imperatives. More preoccupied with the penetration of male bodies and the instability of narratives emerging from them than with their solidification, this novel uses the register of the male body to interrogate imperial authority and the physical prowess on which it was frequently based. Written in a period of increasing doubt about imperial stability and anxiety regarding threats from the East, *The Beetle* explodes traditional conceptions of masculinity while deploying fantasies of sexual subjugation to highlight an unruly porous, and unstable British imagination, underscoring that modes of sexual desire traditionally associated with the East are actually domestic. Deploying representations of both male bodies and male narratives as leaky and grotesque, Marsh's novel critiques both the credibility of empire writing and British governmental legitimacy.

An eccentric piece of late Victorian Gothic fiction, Richard Marsh's incredibly popular *The Beetle* (1897) exhibits the theme of decline and loss so typical of texts of this period. As Stephen Arata has noted, *fin-de-siècle* works frequently articulated 'unwieldy […] anxieties, including, but not limited to, the retrenchment of empire, the spread of urban slums, the growth of "criminal" classes, the proliferation of "deviant sexualities'',[1] and, as I argue here, doubts about the impenetrability of British male bodies and the stability of Western knowledge and narrative authority.[2] While the traditional conception of the male body as a bounded entity was inextricably linked to Victorian perceptions of masculinity and masculine prowess,[3]

[1] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

[2] *The Beetle* also reflects a pervasive concern with 'reverse colonization,' which was often expressed through narratives where 'the 'civilized world' is on the point of being overrun by 'primitive' forces', and which often featured a linkage 'to perceived problems—racial, moral, spiritual—within Great Britain itself' (Arata, p. 108).

[3] See Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3; Andrew Dowling, *Maniliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 13-14; Joseph Kestner, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot: Scholar Press), pp. 97-98; and John A Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New

in the context of imperial decay, *The Beetle* represents both the male body and male imagination as porous entities, rather than solid ones.[4] Interrogating the boundaries of both bodies and institutional and fictional empire writing, ultimately linking bodily sensation to narrative through the 'erotics of reading,"[5] this novel critiques justifications of patriarchal governance and imperial legitimacy: which ultimately become leaky, grotesque, and thus profoundly unstable. Thus, this Gothic text is an example of late Victorian empire writing that, while seemingly indulging in imperial fantasy, actually deploys a strategy of auto-critique (that is, demonstrating its own instabilities by way of excavating its ostensible representations) in order to destabilize imperial epistemology.

The Beetle's concerns with the frailty of masculinity, the penetration of the male body, and the dissolution of narrative efficacy are timely: British economic institutions faced pressure surrounding the maintenance of the Suez Canal,[6] anxieties about sexual exchange and contagion were coming to the fore, and the Egyptian Question and the Mahdist menace loomed on the horizon. Tapping into prevalent popular concerns about British economic and cultural stake in Egypt,[7] Marsh's novel brings the impacts of imperial projects in Egypt on British masculinity to the home front as it uses the metaphor of invaded physical bodies to explore the instabilities of bodies of knowledge as constructed by culturally and institutionally authorized imperial narratives. In working through these problems of stability, *The Beetle* explores dangers of gender disruption, capture, physical dissolution, bodily penetration, and threats to normativity and to 'white skin"[8] in the *fin-de-siècle*

Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 187-189.

[4] As Pamela K. Gilbert has shown in *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), the tension between the fluid and solid body that Herbert Sussman suggests is so crucial to the formation of Victorian manhood was not only pervasive, but crucially underpinned discourses of social health (pp. 133-134).

[5] Arata uses this term to describe the libidinal aspects of reading: the deferral, deciphering, and grasping of textual information (pp. 68-69).

[6] See Alise Bulfin's 'The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal' in *English Literature in Translation 1880-1920*, 54:4 (2011), pp. 411-443.

[7] Throughout the nineteenth century, Egyptian lore and imagery increasingly infused British art and literature. Even the chauvinist J.W. Buel described Egypt as 'the parent of human advancement' that 'gave to the world the genius of substantial progress, which developed the highest intellectual faculties, builded [sic] magnificent cities, established museums of arts, set examples of human aggrandizement, produced surprising results in engineering, created sciences, and gave form to government and law' in *Heroes of the Dark Continent: A Complete History of all the Great Explorations and Discoveries in Africa, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 33.

[8] Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* [1897] ed. Julian Wolfreys (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 86. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

British imagination. In a four-part narrative, the novel begins with the perspective of Robert Holt, an unemployed clerk, who, emaciated and exhausted, crawls into a mysterious house in the western suburbs of London in search of shelter. Inside, he is hypnotized, assaulted, and possessed by the Lord of the Beetle, a bi-gendered, shape-shifting priest(ess) in the cult of Isis. He is sent on a mission across London to steal a packet of letters from celebrity parliamentarian Paul Lessingham, whose own fraught history of subjugation by the Beetle has rendered him traumatized. The creature then uses these letters, written by Paul's fiancée, Marjorie Lindon, an independent young woman sympathetic to Lessingham's Liberal politics, to draw her into its schemes and abduct her. Also sucked into the subsequent mysterious hazards is Sydney Atherton, a mercurial gentleman scientist who is Marjorie's confidant and would-be lover. Sydney's narrative takes over from Holt's and conveys his supposed devotion to Marjorie, his fiery competition with Paul, and his discovery of the Beetle's plan for vengeance against Paul for escaping its clutches. Marjorie's story then comes in: recounting her dedication to Paul, her encounter with the near-dead Holt, which leads her into the Beetle's trap, and the events leading up to her subsequent capture. Detective Champnell's narrative follows: he is employed to track down the transgressor, account for Sydney's truce with Paul, the newly formed band's chase after the Beetle and the hypnotized Marjorie, whose identity the Beetle disguises by dressing her in men's clothes, and her ultimate (if incomplete) rescue.

One way to read the search for Marjorie is as a quest that galvanises male bonds, establishes the efficacy of the British network of communication, patriarchal social networks, technology, railways, transportation, the telegraph, and so on.[9] This would complement a reading of Paul Lessingham as a broken man rebuilt, having overcome his cowering fear of his Eastern adversary and being sparked into action by the threat of losing his prized fiancée.[10] Seemingly affirming this transformation, Champnell observes Paul's arousal into activity: 'he was getting a firmer hold of the strength which had all but escaped him […] he was becoming more and more of a man' (p. 315). Such a narrative of recuperation, however, is ultimately unfulfilled: not only is resolution absent, but, upon closer examination of the dynamics between characters, genders, and narration, the idea that the novel offers a conventionally heroic male defence of British space, bodies, and identity is profoundly troubled. Critics tend, to varying degrees, to recognize the gender-disrupting work this novel

[9] This is how Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), so often compared to Marsh's novel, is typically read.

[10] Jennifer McCollum, 'Animation and Reanimation in the Victorian Gothic' (Diss. University of Washington, 2012), p. 180; and Patricia Margree, '"Both in Men's Clothing": Gender, Sovereingty and Insecurity in Richard March's The Beetle', in *Critical Survey*, 19:2 (2007), pp. 63-81 (p. 77); read Lessingham in precisely this way.

enacts, but frequently read *The Beetle* as participating in, rather than challenging, an extant imperialist patriarchal ideology.[11] While recognizing that the novel's problematic construction of the East is crucial for understanding the terms by which *The Beetle* engages the Egyptian Question and its impact on British manhood, I also want to suggest that the novel's rendition of the East is more complex than many critics have allowed for; whilst on the one hand activating numerous stereotypes about the Orient and articulating various forms of threat, Marsh's text participates in the established discourse in order to highlight these fears and draw readers' attention to his real target: British conduct and fantasy. Whilst the novel's concern with British morality has been recognized,[12] this article zones in on Victorian gendered power dynamics, articulating how doubts about morality, reliability, and empire writing register in treatments of the male body, and how this novel uses this register to point to the grotesqueness of imperial narratives and render them suspect.

This article thus draws out *The Beetle's* underlining of the relationship between character, body, and narrative, and in doing so redresses the assumption that *The Beetle* is dedicated to maintaining patriarchal dominance and stability:[13] its ostensibly authoritative male characters are in fact just the opposite. Examining the problematics of the bodies and narratives of male characters typically understood as manly men (Atherton, Lessingham, and Champnell) I argue that the novel underscores the leakiness of male bodies in order to pull apart traditional narratives of British manliness and male narratives about empire. Such norms frequently celebrated men's bodies as being bounded, solid, and impermeable. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, traditionally it is

> woman's corporeality [that] is inscribed as a mode of seepage […] The metamorphics of uncontrollability, the ambivalence between

[11] For instance, Kelly Hurley adopts an Orientalist reading of *The Beetle* in 'The Inner Chambers of All Nameless Sin: *The Beetle*, Gothic Female Sexuality, and Oriental Barbarism', in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Albany: New York Press, 1993), pp. 193-213, suggesting that 'textual stereotypes that construct the oriental as "Other"' serve a unifying function for the culture that produces them, a culture which, in the service of a coherent and idealized self-definition, denies those qualities that threaten or undermine its own self-image and projects them onto extracultural groups […] a paranoiac text like *The Beetle* serves to reflect and feed into British suspicion of contempt for Egyptians during a period of heightened British military activity in Egypt.', (pp. 196-7).

[12] Julian Wolfreys, in 'Introduction' (Marsh, pp. 9-34) is less condemning than Hurley, arguing that 'the human-scarab pursues the politician Paul Lessingham, less from some irrational and barbaric Oriental blood-lust, than out of a sense of injustice for the "barbaric" English defilement of ancient Egypt's sacred locations', p. 24.

[13] See, for instance, Margree.

> desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep seated fear of absorption, the association of femininity with contagion and disorder, the undecidability of the limits of the female body […] its powers of cynical seduction and allure are all common themes in literary and cultural representations of women (p. 203).

While men's bodies have tended to be defined in contradistinction to this construct, *The Beetle* inverts this ontology, representing men's bodies and/or their narratives (their credibility) as leaky, unstable, and subject to various forms of penetration: undermining the grounds on which representations of Eastern "Others" and assertions of imperial legitimacy stand. Kelly Hurley has explored a number of ways in which late Victorian Gothic fiction has deployed the threat of the porous male body in order to render subjectivity fragmented and permeable. The leaky body becomes profoundly dangerous to identity: 'If the distinction between liquid and solid can be effaced, then other, more crucial oppositions—between human consciousness and the material body, for instance—threaten to collapse as well' (p. 35). Thus, in much *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, material threats such as undifferentiated bodies, slime, and grotesque creatures threaten to permeate, eat, and fully absorb the object of desire. As we will see in *The Beetle*, however, it is not so much the material danger of the leaky male body, though this certainly has repercussions for masculine identity, that acts as the most fearsome peril, but rather the untrustworthy, sexually violent, and seductive narrative representations that threaten to consume passive readers, drawing them into dark imperial fantasies.

Subjugation

The novel's most overtly emasculated man, Robert Holt, experiences penetration on a number of levels: he is homeless, and therefore has no "fortress" beyond his own body; he's mesmerized and surveyed by the Beetle; and ultimately the stability of his narrative comes apart. From the beginning, Holt's unemployment circumstances fracture his independence. In approaching what turns out to be the Beetle's lair in search of shelter, he encounters an entrapment that destroys any remaining autonomy.[14] Upon entering, he becomes engulfed by 'panic [at] the presence [of] something evil'. In attempt to resist this presence in the darkness, Holt becomes rigid

[14] As McCollum suggests, the house is presented with 'vagina-like imagery' (p. 183): 'When he [Holt] sticks his arm through the hole [of the window] he finds that 'it was warm in there!' (p.183). While Holt starts out as the penetrator of the space, once he is inside, the sexual metaphor flips, and his becomes the invaded body.

and frozen, 'stricken by a sudden paralysis'. A Theweleitian reading would understand this stiffness as an attempt to ward off the threat of female envelopment.[15] Instead of successfully becoming a phallus himself, however, Holt is emasculated: he admits, though 'I made an effort to better play the man [,] I knew that, at the moment, I played the cur' (p. 49). His bodily control fails, as he is overpowered and 'constrained': 'I could not control a limb; my limbs were as if they were not mine' (p. 50). This presentation of the male body as incapable becomes more entrenched as Holt renders himself sexually dominated by the creature:

> On a sudden I felt something on my boot, and, with the sense of shrinking, horror, nausea, rendering me momentarily more helpless, I realized that the creature was beginning to ascend my legs, to climb my body […] it mounted me, apparently, with as much ease as if I had been horizontal […]
>
> Higher and higher! It had gained my loins. It was moving toward the pit of my stomach. The helplessness with which I suffered its invasion was not the least part of my agony […] I had not a muscle at my command (p. 51).

This presages Lessingham's description of being captured and sexually assaulted in a 'horrible den' (p. 243) in Cairo, where he is 'emasculated' (p. 245) and rendered 'incapable of offering even the faintest resistance' (p. 243). Submission thus becomes a major problem for both men. Indeed, Holt reflects, 'such passivity was worse than undignified, it was galling' (p. 52).

If subjugation is central in these passages, the particular characteristics of the subjugator underpin the ostensible threat to masculine prowess. When 'the man in the bed' (p. 52) bids Holt 'Undress!', 'A look came on his face, as I stood naked in front of him, which, if it was meant for a smile, was a satyr's smile, and which filled me with a sensation of shuddering repulsion' (p. 55). For Marsh's readership, 'satyr' would have connoted lasciviousness, lechery, and male-on-male rape, as well as signalled the blurring of lines demarcating species: the union of two orders coming together in one monstrous body. It is this menacing, unclassifiable body that renders Holt 'impoten[t]' (p. 62). Furthermore, Holt's physical frailty is linked directly to the

[15] Klaus Theweleit's analysis in *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), I of Freikorps officers' terror of feminized 'flow' and their defensive response of 'stiffening' is highly relevant here. In an effort to retrench the male body's boundaries, to repel the grotesque feminine force that threatens, the male figure seeks to become hard and impenetrable. In Holt's case, this fails completely, and the would-be phallus that his body has become is powerless here.

questionability of his narrative. Holt's inability to read the "Other", especially in terms of gender, renders his powers of discernment dubious. In fact, as Holt admits to being suspicious of tricks being played on his 'abnormally strained imagination' (p. 76), these weaknesses undermine his story: observation as a form of knowledge dependent on the physical body becomes unstable.

The ramifications of subjugation for the male body, this power/knowledge dynamic, and authorship are devastating. Returning from his burglary mission, Holt's body is in quite a state:

> I was in a terrible sweat,—yet tremulous as with cold; covered with mud; bruised, and cut, and bleeding,—as piteous an object as you would care to see. Every limb in my body ached; every muscle was exhausted; mentally and physically I was done; had I not been held up willy nilly, by the spell which was upon me, I should have sunk down, then and there, in a hopeless, helpless, hapless, heap (p. 84).

In other words, the Beetle's control exhausts Holt's body, which in turn becomes grotesque here. Fluid exchange with the environment through sweat, blood, and mud renders his body porous and open, as opposed to bounded and closed.[16] However, this absence of boundaries also characterizes the very form of this passage. The sentences run on, ramble, and are held together by semi-colons – in other words, closure is continually deferred. At each possible point of suture, Holt's narrative repeatedly extends through it, refusing to be stitched shut. Additionally, the alliteration in the final sentence here doubly prolongs the closure, not only through repetition, but also through the use of soft sounds. The fricatives h and s serve to defy both the boundary of the sentence and of the body; these last four words together produce a panting sound, as the breath quickly moves in and out of the body, circulating convulsively. This passage, both thematically and formally, pushes against the construction of the male body and narrative as bounded.

Meanwhile, the crucial vehicle of Holt's penetration is surveillance. He reflects that leading up to his invasion, 'I had the horrible persuasion that, though unseeing, I was seen; that my every movement was being watched' (p. 49). It is the

[16] Minna Vuohelainen, '"Cribb'd, Cabined, and Confined": Fear, Claustrophobia and Modernity in Richard Marsh's Urban Gothic Fiction' in *Journal of Literature in Science*, 3:1 (2010), pp. 23-36, makes the point that in this novel, the city of London seems to shrink around and envelope characters through fog, rain, and wind, thus employing the gothic theme of spatial transgression (pp. 30-31), but I would also suggest that these elements work to saturate the body and thus threaten its borders.

creature's eyes that 'held me enchained, helpless, spell-bound. I felt that they could do with me as they would; and they did' (p. 53). The erotics of looking are overtly intertwined with power here, as this scene foreshadows Paul's description of his bi-gendered captor when he recalls his own subjugation in the Cairo den: 'And, while she talked, she kept her eyes fixed on my face. Those eyes of hers! […] They robbed me of my consciousness, of my power of volition, of my capacity to think,—they made me wax in her hands'. This surveillance, or visual penetration, is disabling for both men. They are certainly physically powerless, but significantly, through this, they also lose the power of utterance. Paul confesses, 'I do not think that after she touched my wrist I uttered a word' (p. 240), just as Holt becomes incapable of speaking his own story: '[the words] came from me, not in response to my will power, but in response to [the Beetle's] […] what he willed that I should say, I said'. This loss of power over his own narrative has a profound effect on Holt's sense of prowess: 'For the time I was no longer a man; my manhood was merged in his' (p. 54). Even worse, as we find at the end of the novel, Holt himself did not in fact write his narrative; rather, it has been compiled second-hand through Marjorie's and Sydney's memories. This cobbled-together history, on reflection, becomes extremely unstable. Thus, as the novel establishes authorship as deeply intertwined with masculinity and efficacy, it demonstrates, using the register of Holt's permeable body (and mind) to undercut his manhood, that his account of the Eastern "Other" and his own participation in the events that unfold are less than credible; his narrative of imperial contact remains inadequate.

Unreliability

Sydney Atherton, on the other hand, has been read by some as the closest thing in this novel to a representation of normative masculinity. For one thing, Sydney is the only man in the novel able to resist the Beetle's attempts to hypnotize him. As Natasha Rebry points out, the dynamics of mesmerism were gendered (p. 145): the mesmerizer was associated with active masculinity while the mesmerized was associated with passive femininity. Since 'the sensitive something which is found in the hypnotic subject happens, in me, to be wholly absent' (p. 105), he is able to resist the Beetle's attempt to penetrate him mentally, thereby ostensibly affirming his manliness. Other reasons he may appear at first to occupy the role of traditional hero[17] are his impressive stature, his well-established attractiveness, his breeding and

[17] Margree reads him precisely in this way (p. 73).

status,[18] and, of course, his 'long, drooping, moustache,' (p. 83) which we can easily read as phallic. In Marjorie's opinion he is 'quick, and cool, and fertile in resource, and […] showed to most advantage in a difficult situation' (p. 209). On closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that these qualities are brought to the fore only to show how even the novel's most traditional model of masculinity is subject to "foreign" invasion as his narrative opens itself up to critique.

Atherton is blocked from the full position of hero in a number of ways. He becomes Marjorie's object of humour as she relentlessly ridicules him, emasculating and infantilising him. He also proves himself to be an unreasonable, impulsive man, driven by his vacillating moods, and morally flawed. A gentleman scientist, he excitedly 'plan[s] legalized murder—on the biggest scale it had ever been planned', and there are certain obvious kinks in his ethics:

> If weapons of precision, which may be relied upon to slay, are preservers of the peace—and the man is a fool who says they are not!—then I was within reach of the finest preserver of the peace imagination had ever yet conceived.
>
> What a sublime thought to think that in the hollow of your own hand lies the death of nations,—and it was almost in mine (p. 102).

His ambitions are indeed imperial, tying him directly to an expansionist, belligerent stance of which the Aboriginal Protection Society (founded 1837) would have been quite critical; Sydney plans destructive experiments in 'one of the forests of South America, where there is plenty of animal life, but no human' (p. 118). Dismissing both the presence of indigenous and animal life, Sydney reveals the morals of his projects to be profoundly misdirected concerning the impacts of military research.[19]

[18] Roger Luckhurst similarly reads Sydney's middle-class station and ability to resist hypnosis as markers of masculine power in *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[19] Anna Maria Jones likewise finds Sydney problematic, condemning his propensity for killing street cats at random: 'Arguably, a Victorian audience might have been less shocked by Atherton's impromptu animal testing than many twenty-first-century readers; however, given the popularity and visibility of the anti-vivisection movement and of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which had been instrumental in passing the Drugging of Animals Act (1876) and the Cruelty to Animals Act (1876), it seems likely that many of Marsh's readers would have understood Sydney's actions as at least legally culpable if not morally reprehensible', 'Conservation of Energy, Individual Agency, and Gothic Terror in Richard Marsh's *The* Beetle, or, What's scarier than an ancient, evil, shape-shifting bug?' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39:1 (2010), pp. 65-85 (p. 78). Further references are given as citations in the text.

As Anna Maria Jones aptly puts it, 'Of all people, Sydney Atherton seems ill-suited to hold 'the life and death of nations' in his ham-fisted hands' (p. 79). In these ways, he fails to uphold the masculine ideals of control, restraint, and honour.

Most importantly for recognizing his narrative as unreliable, however, is the fact that Atherton's accounts are frequently contradictory. His descriptions of Lessingham's physique are inconsistent: Sydney at one time sketches Paul as 'broad shoulder[ed]' (p. 75), and at another as 'a stick of a man' (p. 92). Atherton is also evasive about his reasons for letting Holt escape after robbing Lessingham of Marjorie's letters (provoking Champnell to remark, 'at certain seasons, Atherton is a queer fish,—but that [letting Holt escape] sounds very queer indeed' [p. 250]). Furthermore, he withholds from his own narrative the likelihood that, after hours of drinking with his friend Woodville, he finds himself quite intoxicated (as his behaviour indicates) when the Beetle appears at his lab in the middle of the night. This of course renders his account of what happened less than firm. In Atherton's words, 'My own senses reeled' (p. 138); 'whether or not I had been the victim of an ocular delusion I could not be sure' (p. 145). Thus, if the ostensible standard of British manliness is feminized, infantilized, vacillating, and profoundly unreliable, then the standard British ideal is very much in trouble.

Sydney's questionability intensifies, however, when he admits to the Beetle that its attempts to con him will not work, since 'I'm a bit in that line myself, you know' (p. 142). Whatever the 'line' is to which he refers here, this admission aligns Atherton's practices with those of the creature. And in terms of his position as a scientist and technological producer whose interest in 'legalized', and therefore state-sanctioned, 'murder' and weapons of war (p. 102) is very much aligned with militant imperial imperatives and national prowess, Atherton destabilizes British masculine identity through his embodiment of the disruptive qualities belonging to the very "Other" to which he is ostensibly opposed. In other words, Atherton becomes associated with the East and its attendant threats. The text subtly continues to position him in this way. While Sydney's inventions are on one hand products of Western science and technology, references to his work suggest otherwise. The chapter title, 'Atherton's Magic Vapour' (p. 131) connotes sorcery, his lab is described as a 'wizard's cave' (p. 154), and he boasts to the Beetle: 'You may suppose yourself to be something of a magician, but it happens, unfortunately for you, that I can do a bit in that line myself […] my stronghold […] contains magic enough to make a show of a hundred thousand such as you' (p. 145).

Indeed, though he has his own 'magic', Atherton finds himself drawn to the Beetle's mysterious powers: 'If the thing had been a trick, then what was it? Was it something new in scientific marvels? Could he give me as much instruction in the

qualities of unknown forces as I could him?' (p. 146). He recognizes the Beetle's extraordinary abilities, musing, 'there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in our philosophy' (pp. 149-50). Meanwhile, Marjorie ascribes to Atherton extraordinary powers: of sex appeal: 'I have heard it said that he possesses the hypnotic power to an unusual degree, and that, if he chose to exercise it, he might become a danger to society' (p. 194). This is seemingly teasing and lighthearted, but Atherton's other disruptive, destabilising qualities and the very real danger to humanity he poses through his 'pleasant little fancy […] for slaughtering my fellows' (p. 155) render this 'hypnotic power' akin to the Beetle's. Lastly, as the Beetle compares Atherton to itself, it remarks, 'Those who hate are kin' (p. 143). Both Atherton and the Beetle are menaces associated with the East that reside in London; but, with Atherton, threats traditionally associated with the foreign are now represented not only through a sense of 'reverse colonization'[20] as the foreign controls spaces within the metropole, but as emerging from within male British bodies and narratives themselves.

Indeterminacy

Paul Lessingham, too, represents infiltration of the supposed foreign into the domestic male body. Similarly to Holt, Lessingham starts out an emasculated figure. His story of penetration emerges as he relates his capture and subjugation in Cairo by the Children of Isis that rendered him a 'fibreless, emasculated creature' (p. 245). Significantly, by the close of the novel, he doesn't recover fully and it is implied that he never will. But if Paul is a penetrated figure, he is simultaneously a sign of indeterminacy.

Descriptions of Lessingham are vague. For Holt he is 'a fine specimen of manhood' (p. 64). The Beetle only says that 'he is good to look at': 'He is straight,—straight as the mast of a ship,—he is tall,—his skin is white; he is strong' (p. 64), giving an idea of manly qualities rather than a physical image of Paul. Atherton, as we have seen, gives different accounts of Lessingham's appearance. But while Lessingham's body resists being confirmed, the same is true of his character; his back-story is heterologic. The Beetle describes him as 'all treachery', 'false', and 'hard as the granite rock,—cold as the snows of Ararat. In him there is none of life's warm blood' (p. 64). Importantly, the Beetle's story and Paul's are contradictory: Lessingham maintains he was imprisoned and violated, while the Beetle rages, Paul 'has taken [her] to his bosom' only to 'steal from her like a thief in the night' (p. 64).

[20] See Arata, p. 108.

Holt notices in the Beetle's reflections 'a note of tenderness,—a note of which I had not deemed him capable' (p. 64). Meanwhile, for Marjorie, Paul is 'stronger, greater, better even than his words' (p. 187). And then again for Sydney, Paul is an empty person: 'If you were to sink a shaft from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, you would find inside him nothing but the dry bones of parties and politics' (p. 97).[21] This typifies the insubstantiality of both Paul's character and body; he's secretive, reticent, and very keen on hiding his past from Marjorie (p.251). No interiority for Paul is offered: glimpses of his internal state are only provided through the lenses of other characters. And what these characters seem to know of him is only what 'all the world knows' (p. 63, p. 75, p. 121, p. 158, p. 170, p. 250);[22] a public veneer obfuscates the hidden, insubstantial private one. His presence is iconic rather than material; he is 'the god of [Holt's] political idolatry' (p. 76), while the phrase, 'The Great Paul Lessingham' (p. 75), is used repeatedly and ironically signals inadequacy. But most importantly, like the Beetle, Paul is unclassifiable and resists really being known.

What he is in fact known for is eloquence, which is his own means of enchanting. Even Atherton is won over by Lessingham's speech in parliament; it is his rhetoric and performance rather than content, however, that are convincing. The same is true for Marjorie when she first encounters his prose: 'The speaker's words showed such knowledge, charity, and sympathy that they went straight to my heart' (p. 187). His words are the means of her enchantment, 'the first stirring of my pulses' (p. 187). Lessingham thus functions as a mesmerizer of the citizenry, being positioned alongside two other magicians in this text: Atherton and the Beetle. In this way, Marsh argues that the authenticity of narrative and narrative forms are limited by instabilities and contradictions highlighted by the foreign threat but exemplified within British male narratives themselves.

The narrative instability that emerges upon a closer examination of the representation of Paul's performance is reflected in his bodily discomposure. The Beetle predicts early in Holt's narrative that Paul's body will violently dissolve: 'he shall be ground between the upper and the nether stones in the towers of anguish, and all that is left of him be cast on the accursed stream of the bitter waters' (p. 87). This does, in a sense, unfold, from the notional internal ruptures of the parliamentarian's invented 'local lesion', offered as an explanation for Paul's ostensible reliving of past

[21] This anticipates Marlow's description of the brick maker, the 'papier-mâché Mephistopheles' in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963), as hollow: 'it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe', p. 26.

[22] 'what is known to all the world', p. 250.

trauma inflicted by the Beetle (p. 115), to the crumbling that Detective Champnell witnesses: 'I was conscious of his pallid cheeks, the twitched muscles of his mouth, the feverish glitter of his eyes […] The mental strain which he had been recently undergoing was proving too much for his physical strength' (p. 292). Importantly, Lessingham's physical weakness is linked to the untrustworthiness of his narrative, which, as I argue below, also threatens to fold in on itself. As the novel moves on to the detective's account, it intensifies its argument that if these gendered bodies are shown to be unstable and grotesque, then narratives emerging from these bodies are also frighteningly unstable.

Grotesque Narratives

In considering narrative mechanisms, it is worth recognizing that the late-Victorian interest in hermeneutic method and close reading of patterns and signification[23] is exemplified in this novel in at least three ways. First, *The Beetle* engages with the problematic, so fundamental in detective fiction, of using information to track down truth. Secondly, it asks readers to themselves be closely attentive of narrative, not to passively imbibe it. Thirdly, it cultivates criticality in the readership by forcing evaluation of characters' discernment. As we have seen, these men's accounts are decidedly fallible, but it may be Paul's story of his capture in Egypt, framed by Champnell, that most destabilizes the credibility of narrative.

Paul's story about his captivity in Egypt at the hands of the Priestess of Isis is not a cleanly enclosed, complete, or contained story: he rambles, interrupts himself with meta-narrative reflections, and refers back to the present moment, disrupting boundaries of time and locations of the present. These incisions into his narrative are frequent: 'You will smile,—I should smile, perhaps, were I the listener instead of you' (p. 240); 'You must forgive me if I seem to stumble in the telling' (p. 241); 'I do not, of course, pretend to give you the exact text of her words, but they were to that effect' (p. 241); 'I have hesitated, and still do hesitate, to assert where, precisely, fiction ended and fact began' (p. 242); and so on. Not only does he keep disrupting the flow of events in his tale, but he also pokes holes in its truth value: in other

[23] See Arata's discussion of the emergence of the figure of the 'professional reader' and social interest in practices of interpretation during the *fin-de-siècle*, pp. 3-4. D.A. Miller's analysis of the ways in which the significance of supposedly 'trifling' details began to register in late-Victorian novels is also relevant here in terms of recognizing the dynamics of disciplinary power and resistance that are at stake in the narrative of *The Beetle*. Though, in this case, the novel may be said to be disciplining its readers to be critical subjects. See *The Novel and the Police*, esp. pp. 17-32.

words, his own methods of narration render his narrative leaky, uncertain, and unbounded.[24]

While he is able to offer what I am arguing is a narrative in grotesque form, his mode of expression has been yet further compromised. Paul's trauma manifests itself in the inability to recognize written language, to produce it, and to speak: 'I suffered from a species of aphasia' (p. 246). When he tells his story to Champnell, he cannot utter the name of his tormentor: 'You see for yourself, Mr. Champnell, what a miserable weakling, when this subject is broached, I still remain. I cannot utter the words [Holt] uttered, I cannot even write them down' (p. 249). Significantly, this unravelling of narrative prowess is directly connected to the corporeal by being sexualised: 'The most dreadful part of it was that I was wholly incapable of offering even the faintest resistance to her caresses. I lay there like a log. She did with me as she would, and in dumb agony I endured' (p. 243). Thus, the British subject is seemingly depicted here as penetrated as a consequence of Eastern desire. However, it nevertheless appears that desire for the exotic, to be desired by the exotic, and for possession of qualities traditionally associated with the East simultaneously underlie the British imagination, as the novel's subject matter itself illustrates.

The problematic of using imagination to construct knowledge, to arrive at some concrete knowledge of the East, is central in this novel: and that is where Champnell comes in. Since he is a detective, 'it falls on him to draw together the various strands, to decipher the clues and provide a sense of closure, though […] as it turns out, this can hardly be said to happen'[25], for Champnell's narrative is entirely inconclusive. And in this way, Champnell's analysis of this case forces a reconsideration of the notion of writing as a concretizing power. Its ostensible function is to record and "nail down" events, but it cannot contain the disruption the Beetle instigates. Champnell's narrative fails to capture history, and it does not contribute to a stable reality; in other words, this encounter with empire refuses to be contained. Thus, while Thomas Richards argues that the imperial archive, the obsessive control of knowledge and the accumulation of data, was used to build empire, *The Beetle*, I suggest, demonstrates some considerable limitations to the solidification of knowledge through "authoritative" male writing. Indeed, Champnell's narrative, instead of providing satisfaction, explanation, and demarcation of boundaries, in fact does quite the opposite.

[24] As Hurley points out, Gothic works often featured narratives that were incomplete in the sense that they failed to fully explain 'reality' or describe 'thing so terrible as to resist or exceed language' (p. 13). In using incomplete narratives, Gothic texts facilitated, as *The Beetle* does here, an 'estrangement' (pp. 19-20) from epistemological foundations.

[25] Wolfreys, p. 26.

Champnell's narrative, in my reading, serves two major functions. First, in terms of dealing with masculinity, it critiques *fin-de-siècle* romantic and militaristic male prowess. Second, in terms of dealing with narrative inadequacies for the project of consolidating masculinity, it illustrates leakiness and instability, profound contradictions within strategies of protection and fortification of boundaries, and the grotesqueness of fantasy and erotic experience. Detective Champnell, as an authority figure removed from both the experiences of trauma and the love triangle in which the others are involved, offers an ostensibly objective perspective that works to parody the forms of masculinity in which both Paul and Sydney attempt to indulge. Amongst a number of exchanges in which the two bumbling lovers compete through proclamations of devotion to the missing Marjorie, one stands out. As the men discover her absence at the house, Atherton and Lessingham are both dramatically indignant at the prospect of Marjorie's death. However Champnell's treatment of their lamentations undercuts the possibility of pathos by contrasting their expostulations with drier, more subdued descriptions and by illustrating the competitiveness underlying their expressions of grief. For instance, Paul establishes his dedication by threatening Sydney: 'If hurt has befallen Marjorie Lindon you shall account for it to me with your life's blood' (p. 265). Sydney then counters by bidding his own devotion: 'Let it be so […] If hurt has come to Marjorie, God knows that I am willing enough that death should come to me' (p. 265). Enter Champnell to frame their antics: 'While they wrangled, I continued to search' (p. 265). Thus, while the lovers continue to quarrel over which of them is more dedicated to the maiden, the detective focuses on her actual rescue. Subsequently, when Marjorie's discarded garments are found, both lovers jump the gun in assuming her death and professing to avenge it. Snatching at a tress of snipped hair, Paul exclaims:

> "this points to murder,—foul, cruel, causeless murder. As I live, I will devote my all,—money, time, reputation!—to gaining vengeance on the wretch who did this dead."
>
> Atherton chimed in.
>
> "To that I say, Amen!" He lifted his hand. "God is my witness!" (p. 265)

Champnell's use of 'chimed in' matches the register of neither Atherton's nor Paul's noble vows of retribution; instead, through its contrast, it signals to the readership to understand these declarations as melodramatic. Further, this treatment frames these men as being a bit too eager to accept that Marjorie is dead, and instead leap to

establish their own nobility. In effect, Champnell's account renders them buffoons rather than fearsome avengers of Marjorie's kidnapping.

But in addition to undercutting models of masculinity in the novel, Champnell's narrative simultaneously demands critical reading practice by unraveling itself, indicating its own profound instability. Problems with Champnell's narrative go beyond his inability to wrap up the story with a clean suture or his failure to provide a complete archive of the events related; contradictions in Champnell's story demand active reading. For instance, he writes that an English boy was brought to authorities in Egypt in 'a state of indescribable mutilation' (p. 296). This continues the theme of dissolution; his body, but also his mind, had been rent, for he died 'without having given utterance to one single coherent word' (p. 297). However, this statement comes on the heels of Champnell's other note that the boy had screamed, 'They're burning them! they're burning them! Devils! Devils!' (p. 297) which, of course, includes a number of coherent words. Subsequently, Champnell insists, 'Paul Lessingham […] has ceased to be a haunted man' (p. 320). Well, almost: 'None the less he continues to have what seems to be a constitutional disrelish for the subject of beetles, nor can he himself be induced to speak of them […] there are still moments in which he harks back, with something like physical shrinking to that awful nightmare of the past' (p. 320). Thus Paul, despite Champnell's assessment, is still very much haunted.

Indeed, as the novel draws to its conclusion, more narrative problems emerge, not least significantly the perforations in the notion of authenticity. Only in the last chapter do we learn that "Paul Lessingham" is a pseudonym (p. 319). Because this is not disclosed at the start, it forces a rethinking of what we've been asked to believe all along. Furthermore, we learn that Marjorie's narrative was written during a period of madness; 'she was for something like three years under medical supervision as a lunatic', and then her 'restoration […] was a matter of years' (p. 319). This undoubtedly colours the reliability of her story. Even Champnell cannot offer a particularly reliable account, as it is 'several years since I bore my part in the events which I have rapidly sketched' (p. 319). As for Holt's narrative, it is a composition of information related to Atherton (who we can only assume has been asked to provide an account at the same time Champnell and Marjorie have set theirs down: that is, many years after the fact) and Marjorie (who, as we discover only at the novel's close, has to work back across the divide of madness to recount what Holt had divulged to her [p. 321]). Further, Champnell reveals that he made the choice to present Holt's narrative as first person for aesthetic reasons rather than offering information as it was gathered: another strike against the objectivity seemingly

claimed by this genre of multi-voiced narration. In these ways, Champnell's narrative deeply undermines itself.

But perhaps the most significant discrepancy evident in Champnell's prose is his simultaneous loathing for the foreign entity assaulting Marjorie and his fantasising about her fate. In dialogue with a larger collective imagination, the novel ostensibly depicts Eastern desires in a particular way, namely, the burning of white women and the emasculation of white men via their subjugation (and in *The Beetle's* case, rape) and consequent impotence in failing to protect said white women. Accordingly, the narratives within the novel use violence against women in order to solidify the vilification of the "Other": this process hinges on both the objectification of women's bodies, i.e. as things that experience pain and assault, and an eroticization of torture via the circuitous route of the lusty foreigner. These violent erotics are expressed both in idea and in form, as Champnell's reverie illustrates. When Paul queries, 'what must this wretch have done to her? How my darling must have suffered', Champell muses, 'That was a theme on which I myself scarcely ventured to allow my thoughts to rest' (p. 293). But he does:

> The notion of a gently-nurtured girl being at the mercy of that fiend incarnate, possessed […] of all the paraphernalia of horror and dread, was one which caused me tangible shrinkings of the body. Whence had come those shrieks and yells, of which the writer of the report spoke, which had caused the Arab's fellow-passengers to think that murder was being done? What unimaginable agony had caused them? What speechless torture? And the 'wailing noise,' which had induced the prosaic, inundated London cabman to get twice off his box to see what was the matter, what anguish had been provocative of that? The helpless girl who had already endured so much, endured, perhaps, that to which death would have been preferred!—shut up in that rattling jolting box on wheels, alone with that diabolical Asiatic, with the enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors,—what might she not, while being borne through the heart of civilized London, have been made to suffer? What had she not been made to suffer to have kept up that 'wailing noise'? (p. 293)

No new information is given here, the details were conveyed in the reports received. Champnell lingers here for emphasis.[26] The idea of suffering is reiterated through

[26] Vuohelainen recognizes that '*The Beetle* dwells excessively, even titillatingly, on the unseen

references to 'horror,' 'dread', 'torture', 'agony,' 'endured,', 'anguish', and so on, and is emphasized through sensory language such as "shrieks," 'yells', and 'wailing', and kinetic signifiers like 'rattling',. 'jolting' and 'tangible shrinkings of the body.' This impact on the body is significant: Champnell physically feels the effects of the assault he is conceiving, and the implication is that, due to this process of reading sensational language, a parallel dynamic between the reader and the text occurs. This reverberation is specific: Champnell's rendition emphasizes penetration, not only in terms of resonances throughout his body. In addition to the phallic connotations of the 'enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors', the idea that 'the helpless girl' suffers as she is 'borne through the heart of civilized London' suggests an ultimate invasion of the nation, a transgression that is augmented by the fact that England seems powerless to protect its 'own flesh and blood' in its own capital (p. 298). Yet what enables Marjorie's violation is the gender slippage that the Beetle instigates. In addition to its own gender being ambiguous, the creature also disguises Marjorie as a man. In-so-far as her body occupies both male and female positions simultaneously, the novel asks its readers to imagine sexual assault against both sexes. Similarly, when Paul lies hypnotized in the Cairo den, his own subjugation is imbricated with his witnessing of 'a young and lovely Englishwoman […] outraged, and burnt alive, while I lay there helpless, looking on' (p. 244). The rape of the white woman is thus simultaneously the rape of the English man, both because of his inability to safeguard her and because of the way the assault on Marjorie-as-man resonates with previous ones on other hypnotized male bodies. And on yet another level, masculinity gets perforated: if the Beetle and Marjorie can perform passable masculinity, then not only have women in a sense permeated maleness, but also maleness becomes uprooted from essential ontological categorization.

Alongside this penetration of the supposedly invulnerable body emerges the penetration of the supposedly invulnerable mind. While Sydney resists mesmerism, Holt and Paul intimate that their defenselessness is rooted in physical weakness. Champnell, the rational private detective, would seem to possess the most impenetrable faculties; so why does he let his imagination run away with him as he pictures sexual assaults within the cab, despite his professions to resist doing so?

The narrators emphatically state that they do not know what happened in Cairo, or possess solid evidence about the burnings, tortures, outrages, and mutilations. Lessingham admits he is never sure if he imagined it, while Atherton confesses,

horrors that take place inside the train compartment and the public cab' (p. 31); but Champnell's role in their narration is crucial.

'Were I upon oath, […] I should leave the paper blank' (p. 149). Meanwhile, the possibility of fancy underpins Champnell's imaginative exploration of horrors currently under discussion. Thus, the violent fantasies considered in this novel are rooted in the minds of these male characters and in the circulation of their narratives. Indeed, this is the very function the novel itself, as cultural artefact, fulfils. Crucially, as this passage illustrates, the central focus of violence is not Marjorie herself as an individual, but English women in general. Champnell thinks of her not as *that* gently-nurtured girl, but as '*a* gently-nurtured girl': she stands in for all white women of a certain class and nationality. Similarly, the victim in Paul's story is a random 'young and lovely Englishwoman' (p. 244) ,a generic female body that suffers, while the women in the youth's story are just nameless 'members of a decent English family' (p. 295).[27] Finally, we learn explicitly that the offending cult seems to prefer 'white Christian women, with a special preference, if they could get them, to young English women' (p. 297). For Champnell, Marjorie is an abstraction and the notion of her suffering is rooted in a larger titillating fantasy that produces a sensual reaction: 'The blood in my veins tingled at the thought' (p. 298). Yet this fantasy is equally about male subjugation: in various ways, their mental, physical, and narrative powers are penetrated and rendered grotesque.

This idea of narrative grotesqueness suggests a dark function of late-Victorian popular fiction. Popular literature and its circulation plays out, through textual representation, the very stereotypes of Eastern desires they construct. In other words, what *The Beetle* shows us is that literature depicting these desires can itself enact them. Thus, writing becomes a profoundly destabilizing force because it reveals this and thus tracks the process of masculinity's disruption. If the Beetle commits violence directly, and Paul and Champnell enact it conceptually, then writers can similarly do violence by conjuring visions of women as primarily objects of abuse and sacrifice: and in this, women as individual identities are sacrificed in literature to the production and circulation of fantasy. They become reduced to beings that suffer. This process highlights the dependence of sexual energies on literature that activates fantasies about the East. In this way, British writing that betrays anxiety about penetration from the East in actuality demonstrates a kind of self-penetration, being from the start a leaky body continuously circulating and recirculating different forms of violent fantasy.

Thus, Champnell's narrative is not only unstable because of factual insufficiencies; it is grotesque in the sense that it transcends the ostensible boundary

[27] I would argue that their brother's disfigurement is bound up with his inability to either save them or to adequately narrate the story of what happened to them.

between text and reader via the vehicle of what Arata identifies as the erotics of reading, and the use of prose to elicit bodily excitement. If 'the act of reading is itself erotic, especially when reading takes the form of critical apprehension—with apprehension being understood in all three of its senses at once: anxiety, perception, seizure' (Arata, p. 68), then the transcendence of boundaries happens on numerous levels through erotic acts: information gathering and fantasy production within the novel (which registers as sensual experience), the process of reading popular fiction for pleasure, and various acts of critical reading. Because of this, the narratives within the novel continuously expand, leak out, shift according to interpretation and apprehension, and resonate in different bodies in diverse ways. In this reading, narrative becomes inherently grotesque and refuses to be contained within a stable body; in *The Beetle* this is especially clear. Particularly in detective fiction, the delaying of conclusions and the deferral of information parallels the experience of reading. Precise details, concrete evidence, and the final climax are all continuously postponed. In this way, *The Beetle* delays climax, with resolution being deferred even beyond the novel's conclusion.

Conclusion

Fin-de-siècle Empire writing about the East is thus represented as being profoundly unstable as *The Beetle* participates in the discourse in order to underline its instabilities. Such representation is limited, as Holt asserts: 'Pen cannot describe the concentrated frenzy of hatred with which the speaker dwelt upon the name,—it was demonic' (Marsh, p. 87).[28] It betrays fissures in self-construction, as Holt further observes: 'In [Lessingham's] bearing there was a would-be defiance. He might not have been aware of it, but the repetitions of the threats were, in themselves, confessions of weakness' (p. 80). And it traces the circulation of unacknowledged British desires: while penetration is on one level represented as coming from the East, this novel shows that imperial narratives and the larger imaginative body of literature that fantasised about Eastern desire, unruliness, and British economic, sexual, and military vulnerability in Egypt was always already grotesque, dependent on circulations and exchanges, and continuously defied containment. That this kind of indulgence in dark sexual fantasy is shown to be "home grown" destabilizes the English narrative credibility even further. Just as Lessingham's and Champnell's

[28] Underscoring the inadequacy of language for representing that which exceeds extant epistemological structures is a key Gothic trope that subverts the transmission and production of knowledge. See Hurley's discussion of 'rhetorical obfuscation', pp. 13-16.

fantasies of penetration are demonstrated to emerge from within their own imaginations, the fantasy of various forms of penetration by the East emerges from within the national literary body. In one sense, the Beetle's function as a destabilizing force engendering madness works as a metaphor for the inability to distinguish reality from imagination. In this, and in its disconcerting repulsiveness, the figure of the Beetle parallels the instabilities of writing, speaking, and weaving narrative; thus the confrontation with the creature brings on the dissolution of manhood since manliness and masculine prowess is in many ways understood in terms of the ability to write, make, and normalize reality. But, more crucially, it is the textual confrontation with the creature, the narrative inability to contain it, and the imperial fantasies about sexual desire and the East, that in their erotic grotesqueness threaten to engulf the reader.

Bibliography

Arata, Stephen, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Bulfin, Alise, 'The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 54:4 (2011), pp. 411-43

Buel, J.W., *Heroes of the Dark Continent: A Complete History of all the Great Explorations and Discoveries in Africa, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* [1889] (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971)

Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness* [1902], ed. by Robert Kimbrough (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963)

Dowling, Andrew, *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001)

Gilbert, Pamela K., *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007)

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1994)

Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

_____,''The Inner Chambers of All Nameless Sin': *The Beetle*, Gothic Female Sexuality, and Oriental Barbarism', in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature,* ed. by Lloyd Davis (Albany: New York Press, 1993), pp. 193-213

Jones, Anna Maria, 'Conservation of Energy, Individual Agency, and Gothic Terror in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, or, What's scarier than an ancient, evil, shape-shifting bug?', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39:1 (2010), pp. 65-85

Kestner, Joseph, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995)

Luckhurst, Roger, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Margree, Victoria, '"Both in Men's Clothing": Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's The Beetle', *Critical Survey* 19:2 (2007), pp. 63-81

Marsh, Richard, *The Beetle* [1897], ed. Julian Wolfreys (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004)

McCollum, Jennifer, 'Animation and Reanimation in the Victorian Gothic', (Diss. University of Washington, 2012)

Miller, D.A., *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

Rebry, Natasha L., 'Disintegrated Subjects: Gothic Fiction, Mental Science and the fin-de-siècle Discourse of Dissociation', (Diss. University of British Columbia, 2013)

Sussman, Herbert, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Theweleit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 2 vols.

Tosh, John, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)

Vuohelainen, Minna, '"Cribb'd, Cabined, and Confined": Fear, Claustrophobia and Modernity in Richard Marsh's Urban Gothic Fiction', *Journal of Literature and Science* 3:1 (2010), pp. 23-36

Wolfreys, Julian. 'Introduction', *The Beetle,* Richard Marsh (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 9-34

ARTICULATING VICTORIAN BODY PARTS: THE CONFERENCE

Beatrice Bazell and Emma Curry
(Birkbeck College, University of London)

> "Mr Wegg, if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebrae, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you."[1]

Dickens's final completed novel is a treasure trove of curious bodily bits, from Bella Wilfer's 'favourite ankle' to Bradley Headstone's bursting nose to Sloppy's 'giant's' mouth to Jenny Wren's 'queer legs'.[2] The most extensive musing on the curiously assembled nature of the body, however, comes from Mr. Venus, the novel's eccentric taxidermist and 'articulator of human bones'. Mr. Venus's shop contains hundreds of ghoulish specimens, described matter-of-factly as 'human warious', and Venus takes great pride in his aptitude for sorting and categorizing these fragments, performing the demands of his job with a dexterity and rapidity that he labels 'charming'. Whilst Silas Wegg is unnerved by the casual manner in which Venus points out the 'dried cuticle' or 'articulated English baby' that litter the shelves around him, Venus's unemotional response to his 'human warious' is symptomatic of a wider cultural turn during this period of the nineteenth century towards understanding the particularities of the human body. Many critics have pointed out the echoes of Darwin's *Origin of Species* within Dickens's novel, and, as Howard Fulweiler has recently suggested, Venus himself may well be a portrait of Richard Owen, a prominent anatomist of the period who was instrumental in establishing the Natural History Museum.[3]

It was thus fitting that, at one of the first events for PhD students at Birkbeck that we attended, we were introduced to one another rather ghoulishly as 'the "bits" girls', a title Mr. Venus would no doubt have been proud of. Beatrice works on the wrist, the neck, and the waist in mid-Victorian culture, whilst Emma works on heads, hands, and feet within the work of Charles Dickens. Needless to say, it came as a surprise to both of us that two such similar projects should have coincided in the same department, but, both being familiar with Mr. Venus and his shop of curiosities, it was no surprise at all to find that this theme was a recurrent one throughout Victorian studies. This fortuitous meeting led to a lot of discussion as to what was happening in the critical field to provoke our projects, and it seemed imperative that we hold a conference to find out who else was working on the fractured,

[1] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* [1865] (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 89.
[2] *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 50; p. 625; p. 787; p. 222.
[3] Howard Fulweiler, '"A Dismal Swamp": Darwin, Design and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49 (1994), pp. 50–74 (p. 63).

dismembered, and discontinuous body in the Victorian era, and to uncover the variety of approaches to such an unruly and fragmented subject.

Our own interest in the topic is certainly in one way part of the general critical turn in recent years towards materiality, and in researching our projects the work on material culture of scholars such as Bill Brown, Marcia Pointon, Catherine Waters, and Isobel Armstrong has proved invaluable.[4] We wanted to build upon a sense within nineteenth-century studies that the tools of this criticism could be used to analyse the physical, commodified body in the same way that they have helped to analyse the materiality of the objects which passed between these bodies. Other conferences of the academic year supported this notion, particularly Birkbeck's 'Victorian Tactile Imagination' event, and the Victorian Popular Fiction Association conference which took 'Bodies' as its theme, both of which were held in July 2013. In the light of these major conferences, we wanted our conference to particularly address PhD and early career research, and we were incredibly lucky to secure keynote speakers whose work perfectly encapsulates the various exciting directions in which this field could take nineteenth-century studies.

'Victorian Body Parts' is one of those happy topics which almost everyone to whom you mention it will respond with a coo of "that's interesting!" And, true to form, the conference covered an immense amount of ground, while ostensibly about little fragments of the human organism in the long nineteenth century. We were very pleased to secure Bart's Pathology Museum as our venue: it made the perfect location for such an event, since it is the "embodiment" of the ways in which, even separated from their physical, personal, and historical context, pieces of the body still hold immense power. A Victorian organ at the core of a modern hospital, its rows of specimens housed in glass bottles, it is still used as a teaching resource for the medical students. For this reason the museum is not open to the public, and there are no photographs of the event: the Human Tissue Authority still regulates the reproduction of all such material as part of its ethical contract with the donors.

Our submissions fell naturally into thematic groups, even those which we regrettably had to leave off the programme, and only proved the ways in which this conference theme, deliberately all-encompassing, could prove relevant to multiple fields of research. We had submissions from researchers on the particularised body in medicine, film, art history, archaeology, disability studies, cultural studies, history, and literature, almost all of which could be described as in some way interdisciplinary.

[4] See, for example, Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), pp. 1–22; Marcia Pointon, 'Materialising Memory', in C. Breward & M. Kwint, eds., *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 39–59; Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's 'Household Words': The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The conference began with Dr. Katharina Boehm (Regensburg) on the body of the child, particularly in the writing of Charles Dickens, as a tool within Victorian medico-psychical discourses, and Dr. Kate Hill (Lincoln) on the skull's potency within the developing fields of archaeology and anthropology in nineteenth-century museum culture, both of which got the day off to a fantastically thought-provoking start. Boehm uncovered the ways in which children's bodies became "boundary objects" upon which competing medical, social, political, philanthropical, and literary discourses on childhood centred, and suggested that in unravelling these multiple meanings, we might come to understand the ways in which literary and scientific cultures influenced and built upon one another during this period. Hill described the circulation of skulls from remote historical or geographical sources, and the cultural and political ends to which these artefacts were put within broader discussions of science and race. As she demonstrated, in the fairly novel disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, many of the interpretations of these skulls came from a cultural standpoint rather than a biological one. Her paper threw important light on the negative potential of the period's urge to classify, and gave us all as researchers significant pause for thought on the need to be sensitive to the ethical repercussions of our own work on nineteenth-century specimens.

Dr. Ellery Foutch (Courtauld) then opened the 'Severed Parts' session with a paper on the cultural afterlife of bodybuilder George Sandow in casts of his legendary body. Foutch described the ways in which Sandow capitalised upon emerging photographic technologies to circulate images of his muscular arm, and encouraged devoted followers to both isolate and compare their own limbs to his. This fascinating paper was followed in kind by Dr. Graeme Pedlingham (Sussex), who discussed how hysteria discourses apply themselves to the titular disembodied limb in 'Lady Wishaw's Hand', a neglected gem of the *fin-de-siècle* gothic by Richard Marsh. Catherine Oakley (York) concluded the panel with her work on comic dismemberment in early film and the concomitant malleability of cinema as a medium. Her clips of early filmmaker Georges Méliès' work provoked much laughter, and were a beautiful way to conclude the panel.

Panel two centred on 'Prosthetic Parts', and was begun by Clare Stainthorp (Birmingham), who analysed the work of a pioneer of a prosthesis in relation to the nuances of gender, class, and contemporary disability studies. Ryan Sweet (Exeter) exposed the surprisingly frequent appearances of the prosthesis-as-weapon in the fiction of authors such as Conan Doyle and Thomas Hood, with its attendant complexities for contemporary scholars. Emma Curry (Birkbeck) leapt from fragment to fringe in her analysis of the appearance of hair in Dickens' creative work and correspondence, and the ways in which this peculiarly separable, insensate part troubles boundaries of substance, space, and time.

Lisa Coar (Leicester) opened the final panel on 'Gendered Parts' with her

exploration of the 'discorporation' of tight-laced men in nineteenth-century culture through both surgical and sartorial means, synthesising historic and medical criticism of the issue in examining Victorian culture's 'fierce anorexic logic'. Dr Ally Crockford (Edinburgh) scrutinised interpretations of diphallicism – look it up – in medical literature on congenital birth defects, and provided a neat counterpoint to the day's analysis of the artificial shapings of the body. Finally, Beatrice Bazell (Birkbeck) analysed the cultural interplay of focus and corsetry in shaping representations of the mid-Victorian female body through the photographs of Lady Clementina Hawarden.

Tiffany Watt-Smith (QMUL) concluded the day with her work on the mutual fascination of the theatre and science in analysing Victorian ideas about imitation and mimicry. Watt-Smith uncovered the fascinating turn in psychological research at the end of the century towards investigating what she termed "compulsive copying": our bodily urges to mirror others' smiles, yawns, and gestures, and highlighted the ways in which psychologists were drawn to the theatre as a means of making sense of these bodily enactors of emotion. Her work was a wonderfully stimulating end to the day's proceedings and has since been featured on Australian radio programme *The Body Sphere*.

The conference drew to a close with a swift decamp to the nearest restaurant for the necessary fortification of our participants' component "parts", and a continuation of the brilliant discussions that the papers had served to foster. Overall, the day provided us with a fascinating exploration of the depth and diversity of current scholarship on this topic, and, we hope, served to forge new relationships and collaborations between scholars. We are so grateful to BAVS for their generous sponsorship of this event, to Bart's Pathology Museum for hosting us in such a fantastic setting, to all of our speakers who provided us with such stimulating material, and to all of our attendees who contributed their expertise to promote some fascinating and fruitful discussions. We look forward to reading the work of the next generation of Mr. Venuses!

Bibliography

Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Brown, Bill, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), pp. 1–22

Dickens, Charles, *Our Mutual Friend* [1865] (London: Penguin, 1997)

Fulweiler, Howard, '"A Dismal Swamp": Darwin, Design and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49 (1994), pp. 50–74

Pointon, Marcia, 'Materialising Memory', in Christopher Breward, Heremy Aynsle & Marcus Kwint, eds., *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 39–59

Waters, Catherine, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's 'Household Words': The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)