

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: The Ethics of Materiality: Sensation, Pain, and Sympathy
 in Victorian Literature

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Taking as my point of departure the generally accepted version of Victorian sympathy predicated on distance, imagination, and vision, I identify within Victorian literature an alternative, far more corporeal, version of sympathy predicated on immediacy, sensation, and touch. In discussing representations of bodily sensation and the ways in which such sensation functions within Victorian literature, my dissertation addresses the connections between sensation, particularly pain, and moral development by examining how psychological and emotional experience is represented in physiological terms. As a supplement to recent studies concerning vision, my dissertation focuses on touch in order to address the fundamental problems of sensory perception, materiality, and psychological experience in the Victorian period. This connection between physiological sensation and ethical development suggests a fundamental connection between corporeality and morality, an alignment that resists the totalizing equation of spirituality with morality and of materiality with sin present either implicitly or explicitly within much of Christian orthodoxy during the nineteenth century.

My first chapter explores the connections and points of resistance between and among

scientific and theological explanations of human existence both physical and emotional. My second chapter reinterprets Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as a novel not about vision and surveillance but about touch and materiality, one which presents writing as the ideal, even sacramental, form of embodiment. My third chapter, on George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil," considers Latimer's mind-reading in relation to the vivid representations of his experiences of his own body as well as of the bodies of his companions, suggesting that clairvoyance for Latimer consists more accurately of acute sensitivity to his own bodily experience. My fourth chapter explores the consequences of symbolic and realistic representations of bodies in poetry by A. C. Swinburne and D. G. Rossetti in connection to both Christian orthodoxy and alternative moral systems. My final chapter, on H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and Gerard Manley Hopkins's terrible sonnets, argues that these texts insist upon material embodiment as a necessary precondition for morality, and equate the non-materiality of a purely spiritual existence with amorality.

THE ETHICS OF MATERIALITY: SENSATION, PAIN, AND SYMPATHY IN
VICTORIAN LITERATURE

by

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Introduction

To be human, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is to be categorically different from both animals and the divine. One is “human” insofar as one demonstrates either one’s superiority to animals or one’s inferiority to God.¹ Only one comparison is at issue at a time: if in a given context “human” indicates superiority to animals, inferiority to the divine is not at stake, and the reverse is also true. Consequently, humanness is less a fixed category located at one static point between animal and divine than it is a fluid range of locations overlapping more or less with either of the other two alternatives depending on circumstance. Thus, for all of its seemingly straightforward meaning, the term “human” remains contested and unstable through its multiple and shifting definitions that rely more on what it is *not* than on what it *is*. When “human” serves as an articulation of superiority to animals, it generally signifies the presence of both intellectual and moral qualities such as rational thought and kindness. When “human” is meant to signify difference from the divine, it generally suggests characteristics such as imperfection, finiteness, mortality, bodily temptation, and self-interestedness. Yet neither definition suggests a blending of the material with the spiritual, moral, or intellectual. The insistence upon this separation of, on one hand, attributes of the divine (spirituality, morality, intellect, etc.) and, on the other, attributes of the beast (self-interestedness, amorality, soullessness, intellectual weakness) relies on

¹ Of the first three definitions of “human,” two are of relevance here. Definition 1: “Distinguished from animals by superior mental development, power of articulate speech, and upright posture.” Definition 3a: “Belonging or relative to human beings as distinguished from God or superhuman beings; pertaining to the sphere or faculties of mankind (with implication of limitation or inferiority); mundane; secular. (Often opposed to divine.)” “Human.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2005. Retrieved 19 April 2005 from <<http://www.oed.org>>.

the association of corporeal materiality with weakness and the bestial, and of noncorporeality with perfection and the divine. It would seem to follow, then, that the degree to which one could purge oneself of the taint of bodily materiality would determine one's position relative to perfection, signified implicitly within this definition as complete disembodiment.

The mid-twentieth-century popular stereotype² of the Victorians as repressed and prudish, individuals who insisted on clothing their piano legs in pantaloons and on reading nothing that could bring a blush to the cheek of a young person, is due at least in part to the impression that Victorian culture trusted the human soul far more than it did the human body and its drives.³ In many of its particulars, as well as more broadly, this stereotype has been largely debunked, beginning perhaps with Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians*⁴ in 1966 but continuing today through efforts by scholars and historians like Leslie Hall, whose "Victorian Sex Factoids" Web page lists some of the more tenacious truisms related to Victorian culture, particularly in matters of sexuality and

² I use the terms "popular" and "stereotype" intentionally here in order to highlight both the vagueness and the tenaciousness of the assumptions that underwrite these images and to make clear that, especially in the more caricatured forms, these images are not endorsed by scholars of the Victorian period. My purpose in even alluding to these stereotypes, which I follow with much more moderate examples of mainstream critical scholarship, is to suggest that the immoderate stereotypes in some cases share a set of foundational assumptions about how the Victorian worldview was structured, in particular its valuing of the non-material – soul, mind, intellect, spirit – over the material body and its impulses.

³ The mistrust of the body has been documented by, among others, historians of medicine who note the connections between bodily disease, psychic infirmity, and mental or emotional habits. Jane Wood, *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2001), for example, argues that physical processes seen to affect an individual's intellectual or emotional experience were viewed as inherently pathological. Claiming that women were seen as "imprisoned by [their] own biological functioning," Wood quotes from Jules Michelet's *L'Amour* (1858) to assert that "the mysterious rhythms which characterized woman's nature also ensured a lifelong pathology in which '(one could say almost perpetually) woman is not only ill but wounded'" (20). Femininity itself, Wood argues, amounts to a state of pathology because it consists of a body that cannot be transcended by a mind.

⁴ Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).

sexual behavior. Hall's archival and critical scholarship, focusing principally on the reputation of Victorians as sexually repressed, attempts to ascertain the accuracy of (or to dispel) anecdotal stories related to Victorian morality; in many cases, the image in question is either found to be unsourced or to come from a source far removed from the Victorians themselves.⁵

Nonetheless, scholars continue to discuss the ways in which Victorian culture valued the non-material over the material, and there is certainly ample evidence that this distinction had currency during the nineteenth century. George Landow, for example, has suggested that evangelical protestants (including evangelical Anglicans, Methodists, and others⁶) emphasized the inherent sinfulness of human beings as a consequence of the fall, as well as the importance of a personal conversion experience based on imagination and emotion; in this model, human nature that stems from bodily incarnation is "corrupt"

⁵ Regarding piano legs and clothing, for example, Hall writes that the "story originated in Captain Frederick Marryat's 1839 *Diary in America* as an observation of one of the weird ways of the Americans. It was persistently used as an exemplar of Yankee prissiness and over-refinement by the robust British Victorians," but she goes on to note that it still enjoys "perennial[]" interest. Similarly, Hall traces the story about Ruskin's reputed fear of female pubic hair, repeatedly cited as the reason for his separation from his wife, to "Mary Lutyens' speculations as to what Ruskin might have meant by telling Effie that he was 'disgusted with [her] person', in her works on the Ruskin marriage, *Effie in Venice* (1965) and *Millais and the Ruskins* (1967)." Hall notes that "it is by no means a contemporary explanation, and is merely one theory out of many as to why he failed to consummate his marriage. Lutyens herself changed her mind (see her 1972 *The Ruskins and the Grays*), having discovered evidence suggesting that Ruskin would have been aware that women normally had pubic hair. The comment about 'disgust with [her] person' was made at a stage when their marriage had become full of hatred and bitterness." Leslie Hall, "Victorian Sex Factoids," "Victoriana." Retrieved 28 May 2007 from <<http://www.lesleyahall.net>>.

⁶ While there is certainly great diversity among various Christian groups (and, in fact, even among Protestant sects) in nineteenth-century Britain, and while not all Protestants would have considered themselves evangelicals, this category is broad enough to include not simply the more radical Dissenter groups but also far more mainstream Anglicans. The degree to which individuals would have accepted these evangelical notions is certainly variable, but these attitudes toward spiritual renewal and moral behavior are far from limited to extreme splinter groups.

and “deprav[ed]” and requires direct spiritual intervention.⁷ Broadly speaking, this emphasis on an inward, spiritual religious and moral experience suggests that moral actions are those that avoid undue investment in the material world, focusing instead on the spiritual rewards that follow a life of virtue led within Christian orthodoxy. Virtuous behavior follows traditional Christian precepts that privilege the soul over the body, reinforcing the claim in the definition above that humans are different from – higher than – animals because the human will can mitigate and control the desires of the body. This is certainly not an exclusively Victorian conception of morality; Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797 quotes Francis Bacon on the relative value of body and soul as support for her argument in favor of female education: “‘Certainly,’ says Lord Bacon, ‘man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!’”⁸ It is, however, an association that can be seen as underlying some of the foundational concepts of Victorian culture: even a secular thinker like Matthew Arnold relies on the distinction between body and soul or mind in describing disinterestedness as a characteristic of moral behavior.⁹

⁷ George P. Landow, “The Doctrines of Evangelical Protestantism.” Retrieved 30 May 2007 from the Victorian Web <<http://www.victorianweb.org>>.

⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* ([1797]; New York: A. J. Mattsell, 1833), 19. Wollstonecraft bases her argument more generally on an insistence that it is the refusal to educate and shape women’s intellect that leads to female debasement and immorality, particularly because it encourages – sometimes forces – women to rely on sexual seduction and other overtly material tactics to manipulate men and to survive.

⁹ Matthew Arnold’s insistence on disinterestedness is a prime example of the association between morality and distance (associated with intellect rather than with bodily sensation). Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2001), discusses at length the association Arnold makes between the cultivation of distance and the cultivation of moral behavior, noting his “defense of the distanced viewpoint as a positive achievement of character and culture” (91). Anderson goes on to claim that Arnold “represent[s] as moral character the very form of detachment he is advocating,” that he “tr[ies] to make detachment ultimately indistinguishable from moral stance or ethos” (113). While Anderson’s study pays close attention to Arnold and his project of self-

Similarly, while the Victorian stereotype as evidenced in perennially popular (and easily refutable) anecdotes such as the ones Hall focuses on no longer has critical currency, current scholarship continues to associate Victorian morality with a privileging of the mind over the body. Amanda Anderson's discussion of Matthew Arnold's disinterestedness associates Victorian morality with the distance of disinterest; similarly, her earlier work on the rhetoric surrounding the "fallen" woman explicitly addresses the conflict between materialism and spirituality through an analysis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, regarding which Anderson argues that "Philanthropy, in its attendance merely on the physical and external, remains impotent to work any real change: the cultivation of spirit, not the rearrangement of matter, elevates a degraded humanity."¹⁰ Further, Anderson claims that Barrett Browning "apprehends the negative effects of modern industrial society in fundamentally Christian and romantic terms. Ideally, she would like to see the soul released from, transformed out of, its material fetters."¹¹ This is not to suggest that Anderson and other critics attend too simplistically to Victorian culture; rather, it is to suggest that the tendency they identify to equate

development through intellectual disinterestedness, she attends as well to other Victorian thinkers and writers, including among others Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, John Stuart Mill, and Oscar Wilde, ultimately concluding that "the Victorians themselves seemed intent upon imagining forms of detachment as intimately connected to the moral project of self-cultivation" (178). Anderson's study does not refer explicitly to the Cartesian split between mind and body, but it nevertheless suggests implicitly that the distance of intellect, which offers the possibility of disinterested reflection, is ultimately more morally sound than the immediacy of bodily sensation. This is very similar to Immanuel Kant's insistence on disinterestedness as a necessary aesthetic stance, which I discuss in Chapter 1, and it relies on similar beliefs about the necessarily interested nature of bodily sensation.

¹⁰ Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993), 172.

¹¹ Anderson, *Tainted Souls*, 176. Anderson's discussion of Barrett Browning specifically concerns the role of the artist in effecting a transition from materialism to spirituality; while my argument does not concern this focus in particular, Anderson's argument illustrates a more general critical acceptance of the Victorian valuing of the spiritual over the material.

morality with spirituality is easily discernable within Victorian thought. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is not alone in suggesting, in Anderson's words, that "cultivation of spirit . . . elevates a degraded humanity," and Anderson is certainly not alone in making note of this general alignment.

Yet within this project I examine texts – literary, philosophical, scientific, theological – that trouble the opposition between disembodied morality and amoral materiality, and I argue that a supplementary current within Victorian literature and culture predicates morality on materiality, and on the sensation that results from corporeal experience. In making this assertion, I do not mean to suggest that the traditional conception, which I outlined above, of Victorian morality as disembodied, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional is inaccurate, but rather that it is incomplete. In addition to the broad array of texts that align morality with spirituality and intellect, other Victorian texts and authors acknowledge an inherent value in physical matter; in some texts, which I focus on in this dissertation, those eruptions of materialism actually correlate with morality rather than oppose it. That is, far from signifying degeneracy or the absence of morality, embodiment and materiality in these texts signify humaneness and morality through a particular approach to sympathy.

Victorian Keywords

Sympathy

The Victorian period's paradigmatically human – and humane – emotional experience, it could be argued, is that of sympathy. Generally understood as the imaginative extension of an individual into the emotional experiences of another,

Victorian sympathy in its usual form reinforces the connection between disembodiment and morality established in the definition above.¹² Overlapping at times with both pity and sentimentality, Victorian sympathy's hallmark characteristic, at least according to many current scholars, is the ability to experience emotion.¹³ Consequently, within the framework of this usual conception of sympathy, one's morality is measured – and demonstrated – by the kind and quality of one's emotional experience. Dickens's Amy Dorrit, for example, is marked as morally virtuous because of her ability to sympathize with – to experience imaginatively – her father's suffering: "She took the place of eldest of all three [children], in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames."¹⁴ That her father's suffering is perhaps self-inflicted does nothing to mitigate her experience; nor does it undermine her virtue. Instead, it is her very ability to suffer the pains of another that constitutes virtue in this sympathetic economy. Similarly, Arthur Clennam's first visit to the Marshalsea affects him nearly to the point of sympathetic tears, marking him as a virtuous character.

¹² The definition of sympathy is actually far more complex than this, and has particular connections to physiology as well as emotion, which I discuss at greater length below and in Chapter 1. However, my contention is that the popular Victorian conception of sympathy is, generally speaking and with some exceptions, emotional and imaginative rather than immediate or physiological.

¹³ Many scholars discuss Victorian sympathy at length; many others have produced article-length studies on sympathy and its workings in Victorian literature and culture. As a brief list of some of the most important critical studies of Victorian sympathy, see, for example, Ellen Argyros, *Without any Check of Proud Reserve: Sympathy and its Limits in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Ann Cvetkovitch, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 1992); Laura Hinton, *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911* (Albany: SUNY P, 1999); Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 2000); Mary Lenard, *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1988); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1996); and Nancy Roberts, *Schools of Sympathy: Gender and Identification Through the Novel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's U P, 1997).

¹⁴ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857), chapter VII, "The Child of the Marshalsea."

Far from being a new creation of the Victorian period, this conception of morality comes directly from eighteenth-century (and earlier) philosophies of sensibility and human nature, particularly those of Adam Smith. Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), presents sympathy as an imaginative experience that connects humans to each other in ways that potentially allow moral action. Smith's sympathy, which he defines as a sort of fellow feeling, is entirely imaginative:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels.¹⁵

Because one's experience of sensation is limited to one's own situation and body, imagination is the only way to experience even part of another's situation; further, though, Smith insists that one's imaginative experience of another's situation is actually an imagination of what one would feel if one were in the other's place. Sympathy is thus a double replacement.¹⁶

¹⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759] (London: Henry G. Bond, 1853), 3-4.

¹⁶ Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*, writes of this conception of sympathy that, in it, "the sufferer is effectively replaced by the spectator's image of him or herself" (2).

Adam Smith's important contribution to the concept of sympathy is to detach it from the body, to make it an essentially imaginative experience. Other versions of sympathy in the eighteenth century blend the emotional and imaginative with the physiological and the immediate. For example, in the culture of sensibility, sympathy is largely a physiological experience – one's body responds to the observed suffering of others through mirroring the effects of the suffering body. One's humanity is similarly documented (and measured) by one's physiologically sympathetic responses: failure to produce tears at the sight or description of suffering marks one as being unsympathetic and consequently insufficiently humane and compassionate. Importantly, sympathy within the culture of sensibility links bodily sensation with morality by making one's moral responses visible and demonstrable through the physiological responses of one's body. For theorists of sensibility, humans have a moral sense that works analogously to the physical senses; Alexander Gerard, for example, in *An Essay on Taste* (1759), writes of "a *sensibility of heart*, as fits a man for being easily moved and for readily catching, as by infection, any passion that a work is fitted to excite."¹⁷ Nearly two centuries earlier, Michel de Montaigne wrote of imagination in terms strikingly similar to how sympathy was imagined in the culture of sensibility:

I am one of those who are most sensible of the power of imagination: every one is jostled by it, but some are overthrown by it. It has a very piercing impression upon me; and I make it my business to avoid, wanting force to resist it . . . [T]he very sight of another's pain materially pains me, and I often usurp the sensations of another person. A perpetual cough in another tickles my lungs and throat. . . . I take possession of the disease I am concerned at, and take it to myself. I do not at all wonder that fancy should give fevers and sometimes kill such as to allow it too much scope, and are too willing to

¹⁷ Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1963), 79; italics in original.

entertain it.¹⁸

Montaigne's description connects body and mind in a way that Smith's conception of sympathy disallows: there is so little distance here between perceiving subject and perceived object that imagination enacts identification rather than compassion. That is, unlike in Smith's version, Montaigne does not imagine what he would feel like if he were in the suffering individual's place; instead, he actually feels the same pains and other sensations, through the force of his imagination, in his own body. Rather than imagine what he would feel like *if he were* in the same situation, Montaigne *becomes* the suffering body and experiences the sensations of illness directly and immediately, actually taking into his own body the "possession of the disease." Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, similarly likens sympathy to contagion in his "A Letter concerning Enthusiasm," saying that "One may with good reason call every Passion Panick which is rais'd in a Multitude, and convey'd by aspect, or as it were by Contact or Sympathy."¹⁹ Sympathy here is a mode of transmission; enthusiasm among crowds can be transmitted through vision ("aspect") or contact, each of which suggests for Shaftesbury a sympathetic communication of feeling.²⁰

¹⁸ Michel de Montaigne, "Of the Force of Imagination" (*Essays* [1575], trans. Charles Cotton; ed. William Carew Hazlitt; 4 vols.; London: Reeves and Turner, 1902), 1:94.

¹⁹ Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (3 vols.), ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 1:10.

²⁰ Later, nineteenth-century physiologists and other scientists made a similar connection between sympathy and issues of contagion and disorder, both individual and social, as well. Alexander Bain, for example, argued in *The Emotions and the Will* (1859) that actors have particular power to convey emotions (even false ones) to their audience, who receive those emotions sympathetically and without apparent resistance. Daniel Hack Tuke, *Illustrations of the Influence of the Mind Upon the Body in Health and Disease* (1872), argued that witnessing suffering (either by medical professionals or, more dangerously, by lay caretakers) would blur the boundary between patient and caretaker, causing disruptions to reason, to the perception of reality, even to the self-concept and self-control of the observer. American neurologist Simon Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* (1885), equated medical

Although sympathy may be contagious (and, consequently, potentially dangerous), Shaftesbury, like Smith, envisions sympathy as socially productive. For Shaftesbury, sympathy is the foundation of social life, and he calls “these Pleasures of sympathy” – that is, the “lively Affection of Love, Gratitude, Bounty, Generosity, Pity, Succour, or whatever else is of a social or friendly sort” – “so insinuating . . . and so widely diffus’d thro’ our whole Lives, that there is hardly such a thing as Satisfaction or Contentment, of which they make not an essential part.”²¹ While David Hume approaches sympathy less as a particular emotion or feeling and more as a mechanism by which one apprehends what another feels or experiences, it still enacts an important social and affective function: “no qualities are more intitled to the general good-will and approbation of mankind than beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection and public spirit, or whatever proceeds from a tender sympathy with others, and a generous concern for our kind and species. These wherever they appear, seem to transfuse themselves, in a manner, into each beholder, and to call forth, in their own behalf, the same favourable and affectionate sentiments, which they exert on all around.”²² This understanding of sympathy as a mechanism allows Hume to connect his moral theory to his aesthetic theory, suggesting that because readers or viewers of art

treatment to a battle of wills between the doctor and the patient, suggesting that the doctor-observer must guard against sympathetic incursion of the patient’s symptoms while simultaneously overpowering the patient’s illness through the doctor’s power of sympathetic communication. For a discussion of the implications of these and other medical understandings of the communicability of nervous disorders, particularly on conceptions of the dangers of reading, see Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1995), especially chapter 3. Vrettos discusses Bain, Tuke, Mitchell, and others in connection to their views on the potential danger of sympathetic contagion.

²¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 2: 62, 59.

²² David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* (4 vols.) (Edinburgh: Adam Black and William Tait, 1826), 4: 247.

understand or anticipate the pleasure the art will bring to others, they experience a sympathetic pleasure based on the expected pleasure of other viewers in addition to their own immediate and direct pleasure in the art itself.²³

In all of these cases, sympathy is understood as primarily emotional and imaginative. There is another strand of nineteenth-century thinking, however, that connects sympathy to more physiological processes, even going so far as to root the emotional experience of sympathy in the physiological processes of the body. Although not social in focus, the concept of sympathy within the developing fields of biological and physiological science suggests a communication among the parts of an organism or even between an organism and its environment, such as the automatic physiological process of reflex and the workings of the sympathetic nervous system.²⁴ George Henry Lewes, for example, in discussing the effects of hunger and starvation on the nervous system, notes a sympathetic correspondence between emotional conditions and physiological processes that locates the processes of sympathy within the body itself: “Deep thought, or anxiety, disturbs the digestion and circulation.”²⁵ The physiological psychologist Henry Maudsley claimed that in a healthy organism the “sympathy between all the organic functions” of the body – in which category he explicitly included mind –

²³ Hume also suggests that, since the pleasure in a work of art does not come (or at least, does not come solely) from any utilitarian usefulness, at least some pleasure stems simply from an appreciation of the formal characteristics of the art: the shape, sound, balance, line, etc. Consequently, aesthetic pleasure for Hume derives from a concept of taste that works as a kind of sympathetic perception of the whole work of art, a synthesis of perceptions both sensual and intellectual.

²⁴ See, for example, Charles Bell’s work in the anatomy and physiology of the brain and of the peripheral (and sympathetic) nerves.

²⁵ George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life* (2 vols.), Collection of British Authors vol. 518 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1860), 1: 15.

was “[s]o intimate and essential” that one function could not be discussed in the absence of the others.²⁶ Lewes and Maudsley, and many other amateur and professional scientists like them, provide a version of sympathy – and the language to discuss it – that connects explicitly the emotional and affective experiences outlined by Adam Smith with a more current Victorian interest in the physiological processes of material bodies.

Pain

Adam Smith explicitly claims that sympathy is broader than either pity or compassion (“words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others”), suggesting that, even if at one time sympathy and compassion were synonymous, sympathy “may now . . . be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.”²⁷ Nonetheless, the role of sympathy in medicine highlights sympathy’s connection with pain, and the connection between sympathy and pain emphasizes the links between bodily experience and emotion or imagination that are fundamental to this project. Elaine Scarry has written persuasively about the theoretical effects of pain, arguing that pain can serve to dissolve the sufferer’s sense of bodily and psychic integrity, or, paradoxically, that pain can emphasize the sufferer’s material existence to the point of undeniability.²⁸ In a historical study of the nineteenth century, Lucy Bending identifies a fundamental shift in the conception of physiological pain: prior

²⁶ Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influence, Specially in Reference to Mental Disorders, Being the Gulstonian Lectures for 1870, Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians. With Appendix* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1870), 24.

²⁷ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 5.

²⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford U P, 1985).

to the mid-nineteenth century, she argues, pain is imagined to be by turns reformatory and punitive, but always an instructive and inescapable part of the justice dispensed by an omniscient and inscrutable deity. By the end of the century, however, pain is understood as both unnecessary and even unnatural and therefore a condition to be eliminated so far as possible. She attributes this shift to the simultaneous decrease in the influence of Christianity and its narratives of justice and the afterlife and the increase in knowledge surrounding the physiological causes of pain and the increasing ability to control pain through anesthesia.²⁹

Charles Bell and Francois Magendie were two early nineteenth-century physiologists whose work on the nervous system contributed significantly to a shift in the understanding of pain. Through the experimental physiology of these and other scientists, pain came to be seen more and more as connected to the body rather than to the mind; that is, as pain became objectively verifiable and measurable through laboratory experiments, it consequently ceased to be a purely or even moderately subjective experience, one understood to be as significantly mental as physical. When later physiological psychologists insisted that all mental processes were at their foundation physiological processes of the brain, even subjectively experienced pain came to be understood as a physiological experience. Although pain was now envisioned as physiological, connected to the material nerves, nineteenth-century doctors and scientists lacked a clear understanding of the actual processes of the transmission and perception of

²⁹ Lucy Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late-Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000). Bending's study, particularly as it relates to the medicalization of pain, has been enormously helpful in my project, and it informs much of my discussion here of the shifting conceptions of pain.

pain. Some hypothesized that specialized nerves existed solely for the transmission of pain, nerves that were distinct from those that transmitted sensations of heat or cold. Even after the advent of general anesthesia (in the form of ether) in 1846, physicians were unsure of how anesthetic chemicals actually worked physiologically.

If physical pain by mid-century was something to be controlled, mitigated as far as possible, the concept of pain had not lost its earlier connections to morality and religious belief. Religious writers, especially Evangelicals and Catholics, from the 1820s on had insisted that pain served the purposes of atonement, physical chastisement, and warning of damnation. Pain in this conception was valuable as evidence of the fallenness of humanity, as a precursor and warning of the eternal tortures in store for sinners in hell, and as the just punishment by God for sins committed individually and socially; Evangelical clergyman J. C. Ryle wrote in 1866 of the hand of God at work in the cholera epidemic, claiming that “cholera, like every other pestilence, is a *direct visitation from God*.”³⁰ While certainly not alone in maintaining the severity of the pain inflicted by God both on earth and in the afterlife, Ryle was unusual in holding these ideas so late in the century. Bending notes that “James Young Simpson, largely responsible for popularizing anesthetic childbirth in the late 1840s, laughed at religious injunctions that parturitional suffering was the curse of Eve and as such should not be tampered with.”³¹ A number of mid-century writers rejected the religious dogma of eternal torment on ethical grounds, arguing that the concept of hell implied a God “less rather than more compassionate than

³⁰ J. C. Ryle, “*The Hand of the Lord!*” *Being Thoughts on Cholera*. 2 Sam. xxiv. 14 (London and Ipswich: William Hunt, 1866), 5. Quoted in Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 19. Italics in original.

³¹ Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 21.

his creation.”³²

Instead of a reminder or foretaste of the literal pains of hell, pain came more and more to be seen either as part of an instructive program of ethical advance (through the development of sympathy) or as evidence of evolutionary ascendance (through the refinement of nervous tissue). In the first version, the insistence on the sufferings of Jesus makes him a model of sympathy as well as the agent of redemption: “Not only, as J. Thain Davidson claims, is it the case that ‘Jesus knows the dart of every pain’ for he has suffered himself and can sympathize through personal experience, but these very sufferings are the means through which redemption is effected.”³³ Further, through the association of Jesus’s sufferings with the everyday experience of pain, religious reformers sought to make individuals participants in an analogous kind of holiness. In the second conception of pain, an individual’s sensitivity to his or her own pain, combined with a heightened sympathetic awareness of the pain of others, even of animals, suggested a greater degree of refinement. G. H. Lewes wrote that “Pain is only a *specialisation of that Sensibility which is common to all animals*. It is a specialisation resulting from a high degree of differentiation of the nervous system, consequently found only in the more complex animals, and in them increasing as we ascend the scale.”³⁴ He noted his own inability to witness the suffering of animals unanaesthetized during

³² Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 25.

³³ Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 48. The quoted material is from J. Thain Davidson, “Jesus Christ, the Healer of the Body. A Sermon” (revised and printed in *Catholic Sermons No. V., June 1873. Preached in Islington Presbyterian Church, London, On Sunday Evening, April 20, 1873* [Edward Curtice and F. Pitman, 1873]), 54.

³⁴ George Henry Lewes, *Sea-side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles, & Jersey* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1858), 334. Italics in original.

vivisection, suggesting his own high degree of moral sensitivity and contrasting that implicitly with those scientists who were able to inflict pain without experiencing it themselves.

All of these writers appropriated the language of biological research rather than of religious orthodoxy: the material pains of the body, produced and experienced through the action of nerves in response to stimuli, helped to teach the individual about dangers to avoid, provoked the ability to sympathize with others based on first-hand experience of pain, and evidenced the relative refinement or vulgarity of an individual in relation to others' ability to experience and/or withstand pain. As a result, improvement – whether in terms of morality or of increased physiological refinement of an organism – links the language and concepts of religion with those of science, thereby setting up an implicit connection between bodily experience and morality. That is, while the immediate connection here is between the experience of pain and the development of morality, I argue in this project that more general sensory and bodily experience comes to assume this function of pain in the development of morality. Pain, I argue, is the paradigmatic sense experience: as Scarry claims, pain, for the one who experiences it, can be neither denied nor ignored. The Victorian writers I discuss in this project, however, both imply and directly articulate a connection between pain and other sensory, somatic experiences.³⁵ I pay it such close attention here because the experience and the

³⁵ It is also useful to consider pain as an excess of physiological sensation rather than a categorically different kind of somatic experience. In such a model, pain is located at one end of a sensation continuum rather than in its own discrete category. Several of the writers I discuss, in particular George Eliot and Algernon Swinburne, present images of painful experience in ways that suggest sensation as a continuum, with pain and pleasure markedly similar – even, at times, indistinguishable – rather than categorically different. If we consider pain as an excess of somatic experience, which, I will argue in later chapters, a number of Victorian writers do, then other somatic sensations become available in relation to the process of moral development.

interpretation of pain lie at the center of this project. Etymologically, pain is the root of both sympathy and compassion, Adam Smith's assertion to the contrary notwithstanding. The shifting conceptions of pain – from a punitive or reformatory dispensation of divine wrath, to the redemptive suffering of Christ as a model for human sympathy, to the mark of increased organization and refinement in an organism – insist upon the primacy and value of bodily experience. Of particular importance for this project is the instructive purpose of painful experience, particularly insofar as it was thought to lead to increased sympathy, and consequently to increased morality. In this conception of painful sympathy, sympathetic experience relies on immediacy, sensation, and tactility rather than on distance, vision, and imagination. Given Smith's insistence on sympathy's confinement to the imagination,³⁶ this shift away from imagination toward bodily experience is an important challenge to the more traditional notions of Victorian morality I discuss above.

In an 1859 letter to Charles Bray, Marian Evans wrote that her goal as a writer was to make her readers "better able to imagine and to feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures."³⁷ In most discussions of Victorian sympathy, critics emphasize

George Eliot's initial injunction "to imagine" the situations and experiences of others,

³⁶ This is the general consensus of modern critics of sympathy in the Victorian period as well. Writing about Smith's concept of sympathy, Jaffe notes that "Smith depicts sympathy not as a direct response to a sufferer but rather as a response to a sufferer's representation in a spectator's mind . . . The result is the transformation of sympathy with the other into sympathy with the self – a self already figured as representation. . . . The scene of sympathy in effect effaces both its participants, substituting for them images, or fantasies, of social and cultural identity" (Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*, 4). On the connection between vision and sympathy in the context of medicine, see also Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*.

³⁷ Letter to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859, in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols. (New Haven: Yale U P, 1954-78), 3:111.

even as her subsequent direction, “to feel,” remains largely unaddressed. As a supplement and partial corrective to the critical insistence on the first version of sympathy, which is predicated on distance, vision, and imagination, this dissertation locates an alternative, far more corporeal version of sympathy predicated on immediacy, touch, and physiological sensation. Such bodily sensation, I argue, forces the attention of the feeling subject to return to the body rather than to a disembodied idea, consequently emphasizing corporeality over intellect or emotion. Further, this emphasis on the materiality of the body and of sensory perception works to return the one who experiences particular sensory perceptions to his or her *own* body, producing a tension between individual and relational experience, between isolation and sympathy. This paradox is at the heart of my project since it highlights two distinct trajectories that embodied sensation takes within Victorian literature. Finally, the connection I posit between physiological feeling and ethical experience suggests a fundamental connection between corporeality and morality, a connection that resists the totalizing equation of spirituality with morality and of materiality with sin that is present either implicitly or explicitly within much of Christian orthodoxy during the nineteenth century.

Critical Contexts

While there have been a number of recent studies of particular kinds of sensory experience in Victorian literature, especially concerning vision, little has been written about tactility and touch, about sensations located on the surface of the body.³⁸ Those

³⁸ On vision in the nineteenth century, see for example Carol Christ and John Jordan (eds.), *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* (Berkeley: U California P, 1995); Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1999);

studies that do focus on embodiment and other sensory experience often link embodied senses, particularly the reliance on them, to pathology and disease.³⁹ This dissertation does not suggest that either visual or auditory experience was not central to the way Victorians understood their world or experienced and processed information; nor does it argue that embodiment is never aligned with pathology. What it does suggest is that paying attention to tactility as a most basic sense, and to pain as the paradigmatic excess of this tactile sense, provides a way to reconceptualize and revise discussions of other senses as they operate within Victorian literature and culture, particularly since the sense of touch is at the basis of several theories of both sight and hearing during the nineteenth century; further, focusing on touch allows me to address the fundamental problems of sensory perception, materiality, and psychological experience at work within the Victorian period and demonstrated throughout Victorian literature.

In working through this critical space, I draw heavily on contemporary accounts of the physics of sensation and the physiology of perception, including both the peripheral nervous system and various conceptions of the connections and separations between the brain (i.e., the sense organ that registers the perceptions of the nerves and spinal cord) and the mind (i.e., the interpreting, thinking, “human” organ sometimes conceived of as within, but separable from, the rest of the brain matter). These contemporary theories reflect a growing conception of sense perceptions as physiological and material rather

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1990); and Martin Jay and Teresa Brennan (eds.), *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York: Routledge, 1996); on sound and hearing, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford U P, 2003).

³⁹ See, for example, Fay Bound Alberti (ed.), *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); Jane Wood, *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction*; and Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006).

than philosophical, spiritual, or unlocatable within a particular bodily organ. In addition to contemporary scientific sources, I draw on current theories of touch, perception, and sensation, in particular the concept of haptic perception and visuality, which Laura Marks traces from early twentieth-century art historian Alois Riegl through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; Marks's definitions of haptic perception – “the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies” – and haptic vision, in which “the eyes themselves function like organs of touch,” usefully connect tactility to other senses, in this case vision, while at the same time suggesting possible philosophical consequences of particular kinds of tactile sensation, including sympathy, that support the definitions I offer above.⁴⁰ This combination of contemporary and current theories allows me to approach and read Victorian literature from and through a variety of theoretical perspectives; it also allows the works of poetry and fiction themselves to be read as theoretical statements in their own right. That is, it is not my intention to read Victorian literature in terms of “truths” that are also present in twenty-first century critical theory; rather, by triangulating this analysis I hope to elucidate the contextual ideological underpinnings of the period in which the texts I examine were written.

Chapters

My dissertation's opening chapter, “Body, Mind, and Soul,” explores the

⁴⁰ Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2002), 2. While the concept of haptic vision is useful for making sense of how vision might work as tactile contact within a given piece of literature, it also connects the act of reading – both the representation of how characters “read” each other's bodies and, crucially, one's own experience of reading these literary texts themselves – to a sort of visual touch, to both contact and separation, and it helps to clarify some of the issues at stake in chapter discussions of narrative sympathy and representation.

connections and points of resistance between and among scientific and theological explanations of human existence both physical and emotional or intellectual. It traces the points of conflict and agreement in four major discursive areas – biology, psychology, religion, and aesthetics – over the relationships between mind or soul and body. In paying attention to each discursive thread, I argue that while the ideal conception of what is human or humane often depends on the construction of the human as primarily spiritual, there are in each case supplementary strands of thought that insist upon materiality as a fundamental – and morally positive – constituent factor of humanity. By reading newspaper and magazine editorials, book and art reviews, biological and psychological treatises, letters to the editor, and sermons, I chart the contestation between alternative conceptions of humanity throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and identify not only points of resistance between the theological and the scientific but also unexpected connections between materialism and morality.

My second chapter, “Sensation, Sympathy, and Sacramental Writing in *Villette*,” addresses the connections between sensation and narrative, and reinterprets *Villette* as a novel not about vision and surveillance but about touch and materiality. Specifically, I argue that Lucy Snowe’s self-presentation as cold and unfeeling, in combination with her (also self-described) passionate interior life, provides the ground for the production of her narrative. Writing, both the action and the textual product, springs from Lucy’s intensely responsive physiological sensitivity passed through layers of icy control; the resulting exteriorization of interior experience presents writing as the ideal, even sacramental, form of embodiment. This conclusion is supported, I argue, by the degree to which the physical bodies of both Dr. John and M. Paul are displaced by their own letters, by

textual productions that provide nearly sacramental sustenance to Lucy.

My third chapter, “Reading Minds, Reading Bodies in George Eliot’s ‘The Lifted Veil,’” also discusses the relationship between sensation and narrative, but approaches the connection from the perspective of reading – minds, bodies, and narratives. In this chapter, I consider the vivid representations of Latimer’s experiences of his own body as well as of the bodies of his companions, suggesting that clairvoyance for Latimer consists more accurately in acute sensitivity to his own bodily experience. By connecting the seeming anomalousness of this Gothic novella’s insistence on bodily experience to Eliot’s more canonical fiction, such as *Middlemarch*, I argue that while Eliot’s sympathy results in emotional connection, it begins at the intersection of sensation and imagination and relies on materiality for its existence.

My fourth chapter, “The Ethics and Aesthetics of Materiality in D. G. Rossetti and A. C. Swinburne,” examines representations of Pre-Raphaelite bodies in a number of poems by Rossetti and Swinburne. In particular, this chapter discusses the tensions between symbolic and realistic depictions of bodies in poems such as “Jenny,” “The Blessed Damozel,” “Laus Veneris,” and “Anactoria,” and explores the consequences of both kinds of representations in connection to both Christian orthodoxy and alternative moral systems. I argue in this chapter that humaneness is inextricably linked to materiality for these two poets, suggesting an insistence not only on the aesthetics of embodiment but also on its ethical necessity.

My final chapter, “Corporeal Sympathy and Divine Amorality in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘Terrible’ Sonnets and H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*,” considers the humanizing and dehumanizing effects of pain in these works. By analyzing these two

very different authors in connection to each other, I argue that pain acts as a transcendent force that both connects and separates the human and the non-human, and I suggest that the textual representations of bodily anguish effectively erase the line each author attempts to draw between the material and the non-material. Further, this chapter argues that these texts insist upon material embodiment as a necessary precondition for moral action, and equate the complete non-materiality of a purely spiritual existence with amorality.

This project does not aim to displace the conception of imaginative, disinterested sympathy so firmly associated with Victorian morality. Instead, it provides a necessary supplement that makes more complete our critical understanding of Victorian morality by identifying even within non-sensational forms of nineteenth-century literature instances of intense physiological and affective sensitivity and by linking that sensitivity to humane sympathy. Eliot's insistence on the importance of feeling in the development of sympathetic connections between individuals suggests a long-standing if little-noticed thread within Victorian culture linking both physiological and affective sensitivity to moral discernment, and it is this thread that my dissertation draws out.

Chapter 1

Body, Mind, and Soul

To say that Victorian science, especially the emerging fields of evolutionary biology and physiological psychology, made claims for the importance, even primacy, of the body is to state nothing new. Because experimental biology and related fields take as both their subject and their medium material bodies and their functions (both healthy and diseased, normal and pathological), the importance they place on material existence – the workings of tissues, organs, cells, organisms – seems self-evident.¹ What remain far less well attended to are the ways in which other areas of Victorian thought also encounter and address similar issues related to materialism, particularly in relation to questions of human behavior, identity, and – most importantly – morality.

Both a paradigmatic ethical stance and a site of conflict over embodiment and the sensory experience that comes along with the materiality of the body, the concept of sympathy lies at the heart of this chapter, which examines the nineteenth-century extra-literary context within which issues of morality and embodiment are developed. More particularly, I discuss in this chapter four distinct discursive areas in which the relationships between and among materiality, imagination, intellect, emotion, sensation, and morality diverge from the association of the nonmaterial or spiritual with the moral

¹ This is not to say that within individual scientific communities, much less within the field of science as a whole, materialism (by which I mean positions ranging from those that assert the importance of the body and its processes to the life of an organism, to those that claim that all life processes are entirely material, and that no non-material principles exist) was accepted without conflict. I discuss at length later in this chapter some of the internal conflicts over the role and importance of the body, particularly in terms of human existence, within the field of Victorian science. At this point, my purpose is simply to suggest that, of all areas of nineteenth-century intellectual discourse, science is the arena in which one might reasonably expect to find greater acceptance of the inherent importance of material life.

and ethical, which I outlined in the introduction. I do so in order to suggest the degree to which multiple discursive and proto-disciplinary communities identify, either explicitly or implicitly, material embodiment as a (potential) requisite of moral action or experience. My contention in this chapter is not that materiality is the dominant foundation for morality within Victorian literature and culture; neither is it to suggest a trajectory of increasing investment in materiality within particular discourse groups. That is, I do not suggest that there is an evolution or development from one discourse thread to another, that somehow biology leads to psychology, which leads ultimately to aesthetics over the course of the nineteenth century. Rather, I examine these four discursive areas – biology, theology, psychology, and aesthetics – as distinct yet overlapping fields in which the tension between the material and the nonmaterial suggests the possible alignment of morality with material existence.²

There are necessarily different connections between and among these discursive areas, and this makes the question of order a difficult one. For example, there are clear connections between biology and psychology, between biology and theology, and

² I focus on these four discursive areas not because they are inherently more important than any number of other areas but because of their immediate relevance to the authors and literary texts I discuss in this project: science, including both biological materialism per se as well as scientific concerns and processes more generally, is intensely relevant to George Eliot's writing and intellectual outlook more broadly, while it shapes in obvious ways H. G. Wells's novel; theological concerns, especially as they relate to the relative importance of the body and the soul, underlie Charlotte Brontë's approach to morality in *Villette*, and they clearly structure Gerard Manley Hopkins's individual poems as well as his system of poetics as a whole; psychological concerns related to interiority, the location of identity, and the relationship between body and mind inform George Eliot's depiction of clairvoyance and prevision as well as Brontë's characterization of Lucy Snowe; and questions of artistic merit shape Eliot's novella as well as, of course, the poems of Rossetti and Swinburne. While the science of George Eliot may look quite different from the science of H. G. Wells, I suggest that it – and the other discursive areas I discuss here – maintains a fundamental connection to questions over the value of materiality; similarly, Brontë's mid-century Protestantism clearly differs from Hopkins's late-century Catholicism, but, as I will show throughout this project, both theological systems depend at least in part on a tension between materiality and spirituality. My point in discussing these intellectual areas in their own chapter is not to suggest that other discursive topics (such as political economy) are irrelevant, but rather to enable later chapters to make connections to this material, which is of central concern to this body of literature, while avoiding redundancy.

between theology and aesthetics; just as clearly, however, linear organization does not facilitate the kind of branching connections that can be made between these areas. As a result, the transitions between discussions of the four areas are, at times, more abrupt than is ideal. Because of its centrality to questions of materiality, I begin with a discussion of Victorian science, particularly biological science as it is expounded by John Tyndall in his 1874 Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The vehemence of religious response to Tyndall's address makes religion the logical discursive area with which to follow science, and I discuss at some length both the hostility to questions of scientific materialism and the perhaps unexpected opportunities within religious discourse for connections to be made between materiality and morality. In the third section, I turn to the emerging field of psychology, paying particular attention to questions regarding the relationship between the brain and the mind. I end this chapter with a discussion of aesthetics, both in terms of experience and in terms of judgment. Because it relies explicitly and implicitly on many of the assumptions and accepted ideas of nineteenth-century aesthetics, I pay more extended attention to Robert Buchanan's notorious "Fleshly School" review as a paradigmatic piece of art criticism in order to illustrate the vexed relationship within Victorian aesthetics between the material and the ideal.

That the connection between bodies and morality is developed in multiple discourses suggests that, while it is not the dominant conception of morality in the nineteenth century, it is certainly not an insignificant one. I approach these discourses as eruptions along a horizontal axis: as examples of an association between physiological, somatic experience and moral and ethical behavior, simmering – usually but not always –

just below the surface of Victorian thought.

Victorian Biology and Materialism

In 1870, Henry Maudsley wrote in the preface to *Body and Mind*, “Neither materialism nor spiritualism are scientific terms, and one need have no concern with them in a scientific inquiry, which, if it be true to its spirit, is bound to have regard only to what lies within its powers and to the truth of its results.”³ Maudsley suggests here that engagement in the debate over materialism distracts from the work of both philosophy and science, two fields he envisioned as having distinct spheres of activity, but he nevertheless acknowledges in this preface that the debate is taking place, suggesting the importance to him of distancing himself from the more rancorous portion of the argument by seeking to push the terms aside altogether. Maudsley’s position on questions of materialism should suggest two points: first, in spite of the fact that biological science, including Maudsley’s physiological psychology, took as its area of study the operations of material bodies, there is a clear reluctance, even among mid- and late-century scientists, to claim for materiality any dominance over non-material powers of mind, soul, or spirit; second, that the conflict over questions of materialism versus spirituality was both significant and divisive. Maudsley’s disinclination to involve himself in the controversy notwithstanding, many other professional and lay practitioners of disciplines as diverse as biology, chemistry, mathematics, physiology, theology, sociology, and philosophy did contribute, often vitriolically, and the public debate over both the terms

³ Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influence, Specially in Reference to Mental Disorders, Being the Gulstonian Lectures for 1870, Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians. With Appendix* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1870), iv.

and the concepts continued without clear resolution for several decades. In this section, I discuss this conflict over the term “materialism” by examining some of the ways in which one particular Victorian scientist, John Tyndall, found a resolution through an argument in favor of disciplinary distinction between science and philosophy.

Any conversation concerning materiality and spirituality in the late-Victorian period was fraught with conflict and division. In the years following the publication of articles and lectures by such scientists as Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, Thomas Henry Huxley, and John Tyndall, the term “materialism” carried connotations of atheism as well as of moral, intellectual, and national degeneracy. Drawing on a study by Gowan Dawson,⁴ Bernard Lightman notes that scientists were sometimes depicted “as advocates of the immoral sensualism which hastened the downfall of pagan antiquity.”⁵ Writing about John Tyndall’s Belfast Address, Lightman continues, “Even in the 1870s, the charge of materialism was a serious one. It grouped Tyndall together with lower-class atheists, casting aspersions on his status as a member of the intellectual elite.”⁶ That Tyndall relied heavily, and sympathetically, on Greek (that is to say, non-Christian) philosophers in his address provided an opportunity to his opponents to link his ideas concerning the proper sphere of scientific inquiry to the imagined immorality and impiety of non-Christian antiquity. Edward S. Reed similarly notes the extravagance with which charges of materialism were leveled, often without apparent concern for accuracy:

⁴ Gowan Dawson, “Walter Pater, Aestheticism, and Victorian Science.” PhD Dissertation. University of Sheffield, 1998.

⁵ Bernard Lightman, “Scientists as Materialists in the Periodical Press: Tyndall’s Belfast Address.” (In Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth [eds.], *Science Serialized: Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004], 199-238), 202.

⁶ Lightman, “Scientists as Materialists,” 202.

“Although thinkers like Spencer were labeled materialists and even atheists by their enemies, this was nothing more than name-calling. Many of the so-called materialists were in fact Berkeleians who denied the existence of matter.”⁷ Reed goes on to note that T. H. Huxley, whom he identifies as one such “Berkeleian,” “was widely attacked for his ‘materialism,’”⁸ indicating that the charge was used less as an accurate label for a precise philosophical stance than it was as an ad hominem attack.⁹

The presidential address that John Tyndall delivered to the British Association for the Advancement of Science at the Belfast meeting in 1874 was closely associated with both the terms of the debate over materialism and with the contentiousness that surrounded the debate and its participants. In it, Tyndall, like Maudsley, attempted to establish a disciplinary distinction between science and religion at least as much as he engaged in the discourse of materialism per se. Nevertheless, the Belfast Address made Tyndall an object of open and personal attack.¹⁰ Because Tyndall’s speech lays out quite clearly the basic premises of materialism and outlines the conflicts between science and

⁷ Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1997), 9.

⁸ Reed, *From Soul to Mind*, 33.

⁹ Interestingly, Huxley includes a statement of his own resistance to materialism in a “Prefatory Letter” to John Tyndall that opens his *Lay Sermons* (1871): “[T]he Essay ‘On the Physical Basis of Life’ was intended to contain a plain and untechnical statement of one of the great tendencies of modern biological thought, accompanied by a protest, from the philosophical side, against what is commonly called Materialism. The result of my well-meant efforts I find to be, that I am generally credited with having invented ‘protoplasm’ in the interests of ‘materialism.’ My unlucky ‘Lay Sermon’ has been attacked by microscopists, ignorant alike of Biology and Philosophy; by philosophers, not very learned in either Biology or Microscopy; by clergymen of several denominations; and by some few writers who have taken the trouble to understand the subject.” T. H. Huxley, *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1871), vii.

¹⁰ Lightman, “Scientists as Materialists,” provides detailed information on the response within the periodical press to Tyndall’s address.

religion, and because its reception, particularly in the periodical press, painted Tyndall as an immoral atheist, the Address serves as a paradigmatic text regarding the major issues in the Victorian conflict between scientific materialism and Christian orthodoxy.

Organized as a survey of the history of science from the earliest “impulse inherent in primeval man” (BA 1),¹¹ Tyndall’s speech traces attitudes toward the foundation of life and existence from Democritus’s discussion of atoms and molecules in the fifth century BCE through the work of Tyndall’s contemporaries, including Darwin.¹² In the course of his address, Tyndall repeatedly asserts his claim that it is only through the pursuit of science and of scientifically derived answers to the questions of existence that the world begins to make sense independent of the caprice of the gods:

[T]he science of ancient Greece had already cleared the world of the fantastic images of divinities operating capriciously through natural phenomena. It had shaken itself free from that fruitless scrutiny ‘by the internal light of the mind alone,’ which had vainly sought to transcend experience and reach a knowledge of ultimate causes. Instead of accidental observation, it had introduced observation with a purpose; instruments were employed to aid the senses; and scientific method was rendered in a great measure complete by the union of Induction and Experiment. (BA 11)

During much of the two millennia between the ancient Greeks and the rise of modern science, Tyndall claims, scientific exploration gave way to Christian insistence on spiritual needs: the early Christians, according to Tyndall, “scorned the earth, in view of

¹¹ John Tyndall, “Address Delivered Before the British Association Assembled at Belfast, With Additions” (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1874), 1. Additional references to this address are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as BA.

¹² Tyndall’s references to Darwin and Darwin’s work on natural selection seem intended less to promote natural selection as a theory in its own right and more to emphasize the characteristics of Darwin’s work that make it, for Tyndall, paradigmatic of good science: it is careful, thoroughly researched, drawn from observed phenomena, and developed through conversation and communication with other scientists who provide challenges and point out problems. While T. H. Huxley may have helped to make Darwin’s ideas accessible to a larger public, Tyndall argues, “there is one impression made by the book itself which no exposition of it, however luminous, can convey; and that is the impression of the vast amount of labour, both of observation and of thought, implied in its production” (BA 39).

that ‘building of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ The Scriptures which ministered to their spiritual needs were also the measure of their Science” (BA 11-12). Here Tyndall connects the practices of deduction—of starting with an idea (“that fruitless scrutiny ‘by the internal light of the mind alone’”) – to the irreconcilable binary opposition within Christianity between earthly material concerns, which they scorned, and heavenly spiritual concerns, which they exalted.

According to Tyndall’s assessment, Christianity encouraged its followers to look for spiritual rather than physical causes for events and situations; consequently, faith in the unseen took precedence over the material world, which was thereby devalued and rendered untrustworthy. Later in the address, Tyndall takes more direct issue with what he presents as Christian refusal to use one’s senses to learn about the material world:

Believing as I do in the continuity of Nature, I cannot stop abruptly where our microscopes cease to be of use. Here the vision of the mind authoritatively supplements the vision of the eye. By an intellectual necessity I cross the boundary of the experimental evidence, and discern in that Matter which we, in our ignorance of its latent powers, and notwithstanding our professed reverence for its Creator, have hitherto covered with opprobrium, the promise and potency of all terrestrial Life. (BA 55)

By moving from the specific to the general, from the example to the theory, and from the senses to the intellect, Tyndall both asserts the importance of induction as a scientific method and critiques what he identifies as a Christian scorn for the material world in spite of professions of reverence for the creator of that material, constitutive as it is of life on earth. In condemning the “mysticism of the Middle Ages . . . which caused men to look with shame upon their own bodies as hindrances to the absorption of the creature in the blessedness of the Creator” (BA 12), Tyndall connects the shame of the body (and by extension of the physical world) to a reluctance to analyze the world by means of

observation and empiricism. Unifying the whole address is this repeated insistence on experimentation, observation, and specificity as necessary replacements within the discipline of science for deduction and generality. Tyndall's opposition of induction and deduction aligns neatly with other sets of binaries: individual and generic, concrete and abstract, real and ideal, material and ethereal. Tyndall's repeated insistence on the specific over the general suggests a similar insistence on the importance of the material world.

Although Tyndall's Belfast Address focused attention on him as a materialist, the address itself suggests a less clear-cut, and certainly less extreme, attitude toward materialism. He makes repeated and sympathetic use of writers whom he identifies as nonmaterialists (for example, Bishop Butler, of whom Tyndall says, "I hold the Bishop's reasoning to be unanswerable, and his liberality to be worthy of imitation" [BA 34]), seeming to make a point of defending both their personal integrity and the validity of at least some of their objections.¹³ Further, at the end of the address he asserts the complexity of human experience and claims that it cannot be reduced to mere scientific knowledge: "For science, however, no exclusive claim is here made; you are not urged to erect it into an idol" (BA 65). Noting that "[t]he world embraces not only a Newton, but a Shakespeare – not only a Boyle, but a Raphael – not only a Kant, but a Beethoven – not only a Darwin, but a Carlyle" (BA 65), Tyndall asserts the importance of having multiple – and distinct – modes of knowledge. However, while rhetorically this section may have been intended as a concession to those favoring a traditional Christian epistemology, it is

¹³ It is worth noting, however, that in calling Bishop Butler's "reasoning" "unanswerable" Tyndall was not unambiguously endorsing his conclusions but rather allowing for the existence of a separate religious epistemology.

also possible to read it as a determined defense of the legitimacy of the scientific method: Tyndall does not want his listeners to erect an idol to science, because doing so would convert a method predicated on skepticism into dogmatic insistence on conformity of belief, and as a scientist he values the scientific method precisely because it takes as its first premise the reality and usefulness of the particular, of what can be observed and documented through sensory exploration.¹⁴ Tyndall's conclusion makes use of similar rhetoric to a similar end: to offer an implicit defense of the scientific method, even as it suggests the complementarity and, indeed, necessity of both "the *knowing* faculties" and what "may be called the *creative* faculties of man" (BA 65, emphasis in original). Yet buried in this concession is the insistence that "ultimate fixity of conception is . . . unattainable" (BA 65), that faith will never provide final answers. More than merely a statement of mutual respect and equal access to truth, Tyndall's address conceives of knowledge as being subject to development and new discovery, not static and accessible through either revelation or scriptural description: the epistemology of science insists on the value of material particularity, since it is attention to the specific characteristics of any particular phenomenon that leads to scientifically valid conclusions.

Excoriated as a manifesto of an extreme and dangerous form of ungodly materialism by many of Tyndall's contemporaries, the address reads more as a call for rational consideration of the scientific method itself. Near the end of the address, Tyndall succinctly identifies the fundamental opposition he sees at work within contemporary discussions of the origins of life:

¹⁴ There is, however, a certain amount of disingenuousness in Tyndall's discussion of idols and science: in Tyndall's system, science can never be an idol – something static to be worshipped as a principle – because it is, fundamentally, a method of observation rather than a principle, a set of actions rather than a concept.

On the one side we have a theory . . . derived . . . not from the study of Nature, but from the observation of men—a theory which converts the Power whose garment is seen in the visible universe into an Artificer, fashioned after the human model, and acting by broken efforts, as man is seen to act. On the other side, we have the conception that all we see around us, and all we feel within us . . . have their unsearchable roots in a cosmical life, if I dare apply the term, an infinitesimal span of which is offered to the investigation of man. (BA 58-59)

Either the power behind the universe is anthropomorphic and acts “by broken efforts, as man is seen to act,” or that power is inherent in existing matter of the cosmos and is unexplainable given the limits of human investigative power. Admitting explicitly that the theory of evolution cannot explain, for example, the connection between the existence of the nervous system and “the parallel phenomena of sensation and thought” (BA 59) any more than a person could conceivably “lift himself by his own waist band” (BA 59), Tyndall claims that the entire address “is to be taken in connexion with this fundamental truth” (BA 59). Rather than a blanket claim for materialism per se, the address appears to be a more nuanced call for reason to be the guide in all matters of knowledge rather than either faith, blind dogmatism, or prejudice. As much as anything else, the Belfast Address calls for the separation of the methods of science and religion: rather than claiming that there *can* be no divine responsibility for the existence of the universe, Tyndall simply argues that there can be no scientific evidence for such a claim.

Although his version of materialism is more nuanced than some of the ad hominem attacks against him would suggest, Tyndall’s address still makes a strong claim for materialism:

Two courses and two only, are possible. Either let us open our doors freely to the conception of creative acts, or, abandoning them, let us radically change our notions of Matter. . . . Let us reverently, but honestly, look the question in the face. Divorced from matter, where is life to be found? Whatever our *faith*

may say, our *knowledge* shows them to be indissolubly joined. Every meal we eat, and every cup we drink, illustrates the mysterious control of Mind by Matter. (BA 54)

Relying on the methods of science, Tyndall postulates a variety of materialism that extends from the observable characteristics of nature, rather than a faith based solely on intuited or received truths: “[T]here is in the true man of science a wish stronger than the wish to have his beliefs upheld; namely, the wish to have them true. And this stronger wish causes him to reject the most plausible support if he has reason to suspect that it is vitiated by error” (BA 56). Throughout his address, Tyndall both anticipated and attempted to defuse the charges of atheism and materialism he would be opening himself to, even as he articulated a nuanced argument for a particular kind of materialism.

Tyndall’s argument in favor of the scientific method, and his implicit insistence on scientific materialism, makes essentially no mention of questions related to morality or ethical human behavior, and this is an opening his religious opponents in particular made great use of. Nevertheless, while I do not intend to make Tyndall’s Belfast Address into an argument for the morality of materialism, I think it is worth pointing out some of the potential moral consequences of his insistence on specificity and the individual. In many ways, Tyndall’s version of the scientific method echoes George Eliot’s 1866 description of the moral value of the “picture” over that of the “diagram.”¹⁵ The specificity and detail which Tyndall values so deeply open possibilities for individual connection through immediate sense rather than through mediated concept, for a

¹⁵ George Eliot, letter to Frederic Harrison, 15 August 1866, in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters* (9 vols.; New Haven: Yale U P, 1954-78), 4:300. I discuss Eliot’s aesthetic argument in connection to her version of morality at great length in Chapter 3, but want to note here the surprising extent to which Tyndall’s concept of the particular, and the enormous value he places on it, echoes Eliot’s moral ideology.

scientific method that operates analogously to the moral sympathy George Eliot hints at in her 1866 letter.

Tyndall was not the only prominent scientist to address the concept of materialism. Edward Reed notes that of all the so-called materialists of mid- and late-century Britain, only Darwin could properly be called a materialist rather than a positivist in that he relentlessly sought an ultimate cause rather than simply a chain of events. In addition, though, T. H. Huxley was associated strongly with materialism, particularly after his 1860 President's Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Oxford in which he debated with Samuel Wilberforce and earned for himself the nickname of "Darwin's bulldog." Even outside the formal public debate about science and materialism per se, mid- and late-Victorian science, particularly psychology, was focused extensively on ascertaining the relationship between body and mind or soul. Victorian science, and what would now be called "pseudo" science – mesmerism, animal magnetism, and phrenology, among other fields – attempted to delineate the precise boundaries between the material world and the spiritual world. Clearly, then, what it meant to be human – particularly the borders between body and mind, or between the material and spiritual worlds, as well as those that separated the human from the animal – was a topic that generated intense, passionate interest throughout the nineteenth century, both in the popular and scientific periodical presses and in more private discourse as reflected in letters and journals from the period. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, then, charges of materialism – as well as the actual conversation about issues of materiality, science, and religion – were a common way of reasserting the primacy of orthodox Christian thought against the encroachment of science.

Questions of Materiality within Victorian Religion

As might be expected, the annual meeting of the British Association provoked extensive religious commentary, much of it hostile, particularly in regard to the concept of materialism. Yet within Victorian religious communities, more diversity of thought about materialism – both actual scientific materialism and a more moderate valuing of material existence – existed than might be expected. I begin this section with attention to the religious responses to Tyndall’s Belfast Address, most of it focused with great hostility on Tyndall’s argument in favor of material causes. Given the extensive religious hostility to Tyndall and to his ideas, it may be surprising, then, that even within religious discourse an argument in favor of the value of material embodiment can be found, and I conclude this section with a discussion of some of the ways in which a perhaps surprising amount Victorian religious thinking relied implicitly or explicitly on the moral value of material existence.

Each year following the Presidential Address of the British Association ministers responded from pulpits throughout Britain either by decrying the immorality and atheism they saw running rampant within science as a discipline and the British Association as a body, or by calling on science to maintain its appointed place as “handmaid”¹⁶ to religion, and not to overstep its disciplinary bounds into questions of creation, first causes, and the purpose of life. A few even preached of the value of science, usually by an invocation of the doctrine of separate spheres, suggesting that a properly regulated science would

¹⁶ G. Deane, *The Relations of Christianity and Science. A Sermon Preached (During the Visit of ‘The British Association’ to Bristol, in August, 1875.)* (Bristol: W. Whereat; Birmingham: Hudson & Son; and London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1875), 6.

function as the complement, rather than the antagonist, to theology. In this vein, in 1850 the Rev. W. Scoresby argued that all advances in knowledge lead to greater glory of God: “Whatever advances we make in well-known fields of scientific inquiry, in respect to the Divine handiwork, we disclose additional grounds of admiration.” Scoresby notes “two records of the Divine works,” one discernable to sense and the other available through revelation, that cannot contradict one another since both stem from the same ultimate being; instead, he argues, each should confine itself to its own sphere in order to make its contributions most useful.¹⁷ The Rev. C. Pritchard spoke of the “revelation of Spectrum Analysis” presented at the 1869 meeting of the British Association, interpreting this scientific discovery as confirmation of “the most ancient prophecy of the Divine Mindfulness for Man.”¹⁸ While noting that some irresponsible scientists had promoted “inchoate theories” and that some irresponsible religious people had wrongly tried to repress the expansion of scientific knowledge, the Rev. G. Deane (a Congregational minister as well as a professor of Hebrew and science) argued that science and religion should not be imagined in opposition to each other: “It were a folly to array the one against the other. Both have been, both are great benefactors to our race.”¹⁹ In Deane’s conception, as in that of so many other generally sympathetic religious people, “The crowning glory of Science is that she may become the handmaid of Religion – an

¹⁷ W. Scoresby, *Jehovah Glorified in His Works. A Sermon Preached in St. James’ Episcopal Chapel, on Sunday, August 4, 1850: On Occasion of the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black; and London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1850), 8, 15.

¹⁸ C. Pritchard, *The Testimony of Science to the Continuity of the Divine Thought for man. A Sermon Preached by Request in the Church of St. Mary Major, Exeter at the Meeting of the British Association for 1869* (London: Strahan & Co., 1869), 3.

¹⁹ Deane, *The Relations of Christianity and Science*, 5.

effective means of enabling us rightly to understand the teachings of the Scriptures.”²⁰

The Rev. T. G. Bonney, speaking to a student Christian Association in 1883, went so far as to say that science has the power to purify religion, not to destroy it; because science and religion properly occupy different fields of inquiry, conflicts between them always end with religion stronger than it had been: “The fire [of the challenges of science to religion] has indeed tried the structures raised by theologians, it has burnt up whatsoever they had built of ‘wood, hay, and stubble,’ and of this, even in the best and purest of Churches, there has always been something; but that which was of God’s building has remained uninjured, nay has been the brighter from being purged from the incrustation of centuries.”²¹ Since “All truth, as time goes on, will be seen to flow from one source,” religion need not fear science, but should rather welcome its contributions.²²

Others, not directly hostile to science but less welcoming of its contributions, argue that *true* science could never undermine religion or religious belief, suggesting implicitly that the truth of science can be recognized by the degree to which it either challenges or confirms Christian orthodoxy. William Gaskell began an 1861 sermon by claiming that a science that “disconnect[ed] the idea of God from the study or observation of his works, though done by many of the professedly religious, is essentially irreligious” because “[a]ll the works of God come within its province; they are his witnesses,

²⁰ Deane, *The Relations of Christianity and Science*, 6.

²¹ T. G. Bonney, *The Conflict of Science and Theology. A Paper Read at the Opening Meeting of the University College Students’ Christian Association, on October 12, 1883* (London: ‘Church of England Pulpit’ Office, 1883), 1.

²² Bonney, *The Conflict of Science and Theology*, 7.

testifying continually to his majesty and goodness.”²³ After noting that some modern Christian apologists “despise and disparage the testimony of nature to the character of God,” Gaskell argues against any danger that science could pose to religion: “True science, we may rest assured, can never say a thing which true religion contradicts. It works in God’s domains, with powers which God has given, and penetrating and keen-sighted as it may be, it will never come upon aught which betrays the least sign of weakness or variableness in Him . . . The whole wide creation, when rightly viewed, is one vast school of divine instruction.”²⁴ “The two spheres are perfectly distinct, but they are mutually indispensable,” argues another sermon; taking George Henry Lewes, Huxley, and Tyndall as examples of proponents of anti-Christian sentiment, the speaker distinguishes “true” science from their “false” science, which leads to atheism: “We are well aware that those who are most highly qualified to speak for science would reject with pain and indignation the atheistic tendencies which have sometimes brought discredit on their cause, as not less monstrous for their anomaly than heinous for their sin.”²⁵

More usual, however, were condemnatory responses. An 1842 essay by William Allen explicitly linked science, particularly the materialism inherent in scientific ideas, to dangerous atheism: “[O]ur men of science who have [considered the immaterial nature of

²³ William Gaskell, *God’s Witness to Himself in the World. A Sermon Preached at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, September 8th, 1861, During the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: E. T. Whitfield, 1861), 3.

²⁴ Gaskell, *God’s Witness*, 10, 11.

²⁵ J. Hannah, *A Plea for Theology as the Completion of Science. A Sermon Preached in St. Paul’s Church, Dundee, on Sunday, September 8, 1867 during the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867), 8, 9.

the soul], have either confessed they know nothing about the matter . . . or that it is something semi-material, because incorporated with feelings of body – or else they have so speculated upon it, independent of its legitimate evidence, as to lead them into the wild and heterodox notions of Atheism, Scepticism, Materialism, and what not: For when the mind is once led astray upon this subject, we cannot tell where it will wander into devious errors, truly awful and satanic.”²⁶ Allen continues by linking “that awful error, Materialism” with “still more destructive errors, Scepticism and Infidelity,” which would lead, if unchecked by religion, to “nothing but anarchy and immorality of the most abominable and atrocious character.”²⁷

Reactions to Tyndall’s Belfast Address are even more extreme. One writer, who identified himself only as “A London Merchant,” was so outraged by Tyndall’s address that he wrote to the Home Secretary suggesting that charges be brought against Tyndall for abuse of his office as President of the British Association and for posing “if not a great danger, at least a great scandal, which, I respectfully submit, requires action on the part of the Minister who is the guardian of social propriety.”²⁸ Tyndall “merits universal detestation” for his “wicked” attempts to “pervert or destroy the conscience of mankind,”

²⁶ William Allen, *An Essay on Spirit and Matter: Or, A Metaphysical Discovery Relating to that Philosophy. Viz.: Feelings of Body are not Incipient Perceptions of Mind; Nor, in Consequence, are Perceptions of Mind Feelings of a Human Body. A Remedy for Materialism* (Stamford: R. Bagley, 1842), v.

²⁷ Allen, *An Essay*, 81, 82.

²⁸ Anonymous [“A London Merchant”], *An Inquiry of the Home Secretary as to whether Professor Tyndall has not Subjected Himself to the ‘Penalty on Persons Expressing Blasphemous Opinions, 9 & 10 Will. III., Chap. 32’* (London: Published by the Author, 1874), 1. In calling for Tyndall’s punishment, the author compares him unfavorably with the unjustly punished Galileo, noting that “if Galileo, not content with a simple statement of the truth, had argued that the Bible was full of lies, and quite unworthy of respect, and Authority had marked its displeasure of such unseemly conduct by some light punishment – very, very far short of death – the world would have approved the sentence, and Galileo would have been very properly condemned by posterity, great discoverer though he may have been” (2).

to undermine the religious convictions of lay people unable to judge the viability of his scientific theories.²⁹ Most responses to Tyndall's address focus on its bad science as well as its religious heterodoxy, arguing either implicitly or explicitly that good science confirms rather than challenges Christian orthodoxy and that it stays within particular bounds, not encroaching on the purview of religion. "Materialism I hold to be unscientific," claims one writer, "a grave philosophical error, and utterly subversive of religious truth." Tyndall's Address is "calculated to promote scepticism, encourage unbelief, support atheism, destroy the highest and noblest instincts of man's nature, and crush the great heart of humanity."³⁰ Tyndall's science is deeply flawed because the "business" of science "is to explain nature's laws, not to hide from human eyes the Law-giver; to unfold the wonders of creation, not to attempt to prove there is no Creator."³¹ Tyndall has "step[ped] out of [his] domain to tell us that matter is the only existence, because [his] science and [his] experience have comprehended nothing else."³² "Our precious time was occupied with wild theories and wilder speculations," claims J. MacNaughton in a sermon responding to Tyndall's address; "Advantage was taken of the position of president of a learned body, and of the high platform to which it raised a man untaught in the religion of the Bible, to ventilate his anti-scriptural notions, and throw

²⁹ *An Inquiry*, 3.

³⁰ George Sexton, *Scientific Materialism Calmly Considered: Being a Reply to the Address Delivered Before the British Association, at Belfast, on August 19th, 1874, by Professor Tyndall, LL.D., D.C.LI, F.R.S., President. A Discourse Delivered in London, on Sunday Evening, August 23, 1874* (London: J. Burns, 1874), iv.

³¹ Sexton, *Scientific Materialism*, 47.

³² Sexton, *Scientific Materialism*, 47.

discredit on the faith of the great mass of his associates.”³³ Noting Tyndall’s reliance on “the irrational ravings of an old Greek,” MacNaughton argues that Tyndall’s science is “miserable, childish guess-work of the most unlikely kind,” rather than the true science that would “proclaim the praises of the Invisible and Eternal first cause, of all things.”³⁴ His sermon ends with a warning to science to stay within its limited sphere: “Science and Christianity have separate and distinct fields to cultivate . . . [and] there is a broad line of separation between them – they are kingdoms with laws peculiar to each, and ought to live in unbroken amity and friendship. But if war breaks out between them, and Science invades the territory of Christianity, ‘the weaker must go to the wall.’”³⁵ This sort of warning – to Tyndall personally and to science, particularly the materialism of science, more generally – is a common element in religious responses to Tyndall’s Belfast Address. While many responses to the annual British Association meetings were cautious about the truth value of science, and while many insisted that science keep within its appointed bounds, Tyndall’s Address provoked almost unanimously hostile responses that attacked materialism as a scientifically invalid concept, linking it to the unwarranted encroachment of science into other fields and to the intentional overthrow of morality and of social order. Thus, scientific materialism is equated through Tyndall’s Address with immorality in general and with anti-Christian sentiment in particular.

Interestingly, though, given the near unanimity of responses to the materialism

³³ J. MacNaughton, *The Address of Professor Tyndall, at the Opening of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Examined in a Sermon on Christianity and Science* (London: James Nisbet & Co.; Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; and Belfast: C. Aitchison, 1874), 8.

³⁴ MacNaughton, *The Address of Professor Tyndall*, 17.

³⁵ MacNaughton, *The Address of Professor Tyndall*, 28.

implicit in Tyndall's address (and in much of nineteenth-century science as a whole), religion during the nineteenth century was far from incorporeal. In particular, the doctrines of the incarnation of Christ and of the Eucharist necessitated on some level an explicit value of embodiment and materiality.³⁶ For Anglicans, the Thirty-Nine Articles acknowledge the doctrine of the hypostatic union – which claims that two natures, human and divine, exist within the singular person of Christ – saying that “two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man.”³⁷ The doctrine of the incarnation also underlies the sacrament of communion, although it is understood differently by the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church; the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation insists upon the literal conversion of the substance of the bread and wine into body and blood, while the Anglican doctrine claims that Christ is present in the bread and wine “only after an heavenly and spiritual manner.”³⁸

³⁶ While these doctrines are perhaps most closely associated with Catholicism, in fact both are statements of faith in all mainstream Protestant denominations, including Anglicanism and Methodism. For all, the incarnation of Christ is an article of faith (Article II for Anglicans). The relationship between embodiment and the Eucharist is more complicated, although, again, Anglicans and Methodists agree that the bread and wine are in some way, or after some manner, the body and blood of Christ.

³⁷ Article II, “Of the Word or Son of God, who was made very man.”

³⁸ Article XXVIII, “Of the Lord's Supper”: “Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.” According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, transubstantiation is “the conversion in the Eucharist of the whole substance of the bread into the body and of the wine into the blood of Christ, only the appearances (and other ‘accidents’) of bread and wine remaining” (Catholic Encyclopedia, “Transubstantiation”). Finally, the “Real Presence” of Christ consists of the body, blood, soul, and divinity, inseparably united in each particle of the bread and the wine: “In order to forestall at the very outset, the unworthy notion, that in the Eucharist we receive merely the Body and merely the Blood of Christ but not Christ in His entirety, the Council of Trent defined the Real Presence to be such as to include with Christ's Body and His Soul and Divinity as well” (Catholic Encyclopedia, “Real Presence”).

The doctrine of the incarnation of Christ was an implicit, and sometimes explicit, foundation for social reform movements within religious organizations. For example, the Church of England Purity Society (CEPS) focused on the incarnation of Christ as a model for the purity of nineteenth-century masculinity: Sue Morgan writes, “The theology of the incarnation provided the CEPS with a sound doctrinal basis for their affirmative approach to male embodiment. As the Word made flesh, Christ’s physicality contested the innate sinfulness of the human form divinizing the pure male body. Reclaiming the human form as a locus for divine experience meant a perception of the body both in its concrete materiality and as signifier of a wider religio-national identity . . . Anglican readings of bodily chastity were shaped less by punitive intentions to subjugate the flesh than by the desire to revere human corporeality.”³⁹ In this model, masculine purity – particularly sexual purity – is founded on the principle of the value of embodiment rather than on its sinfulness. Morgan goes on to note that “CEPS members rejected much of the traditional dualism of Christian thought and . . . advocated a new respect and veneration for human physicality. Late nineteenth-century spiritual discourses on manliness were saturated with metaphors of the body, producing what could be described as a ‘theology of embodiment’.”⁴⁰ The Purity Society, and similar movements, may not have been the voice of mainstream Anglican religious belief, but it is important to note that even mainstream religious groups had available to them, through their own articles of faith, a sense of the inherent value of material embodiment.

³⁹ Sue Morgan, “‘Writing the Male Body’: Sexual Purity and Masculinity in *The Vanguard*, 1884-94” in Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan, and Sue Morgan [eds.], *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* [New York: St. Martin’s, 2000], 179-93), 181-2.

⁴⁰ Morgan, “‘Writing the Male Body,’” 190.

While mainstream Anglicanism and even Evangelicalism acknowledged the potentially moral value of at least some aspects of material embodiment through its implicit connection to the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, it is not surprising that the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism did so both more heavily and more explicitly. In 1869-70, the First Vatican Council reaffirmed the centrality of the doctrine of the incarnation, putting at the forefront of Catholic orthodoxy the insistence on the full humanity of Christ. In the centuries since it was adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325, the doctrine of the hypostatic union came under attack multiple times by positions that attempted to minimize Christ's humanity: some claimed that Christ was wholly divine, with only the shape of humanity (monophysite heresy), while others argued that the divine and purely spiritual Christ somehow became joined to the fully human (and thus material) body of Jesus (the Nestorian heresy). Both of these heresies were raised during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and both were denied by Vatican I and its insistence on the full humanity of Christ through the doctrines of incarnation and the hypostatic union.

Thomas Harper, one of Gerard Manley Hopkins's superiors at Stonyhurst, connected the doctrine of the incarnation to the representational value of both art and nature. Tom Zaniello notes that, "As a result of the Apostle John's having actually seen and written about the Incarnate Word as Christ, the apostolic record has had a 'vital influence on Esthetic, because it rendered God visible to the human senses.' The material world 'has become one vast symbol, and a vehicle for sacramental grace.' . . . By giving 'a marvellous [sic] testimony' on behalf of the eternal truths that matter symbolizes, art

shares in ‘this universal regeneration of matter.’⁴¹ In this view, matter is valuable because it points to something beyond itself rather than because it has inherent value as matter per se; however, this view clearly does not denigrate the material world, nor does it pose it in direct opposition to spiritual truths available only through revelation.

Aesthetic appreciation may be the most reasonable vehicle for religious approval of matter, in that, as Hilary Fraser has suggested, “Natural affinities between religion and art have conventionally been perceived in their common endeavour to express and embody non-material ideal truths in physical form through a common language of myth and symbol.”⁴² Fraser goes on to note that John Keble proposes a symbolic system in which “the Blessed Sacraments of the Church were a concentration and intensification of the general sacramental significance of nature.”⁴³

Given the vehemence, as well as the sheer volume, of religious responses to (real or perceived) advocates of scientific materialism, it would be inaccurate and misleading to suggest that Victorian religious thought found the kind of value within material embodiment that biological science did; when the diversity of nineteenth-century religious belief, even within mainstream Christianity, is taken into account, it becomes even more difficult to make an argument for any kind of univocal endorsement of embodiment as a potential ground of moral or ethical behavior. Instead of making such an argument, my intention here is simply to point out that, at the same time religious

⁴¹ Tom Zaniello, *Hopkins in the Age of Darwin* (Iowa City: U Iowa P, 1988); quoted passages are from Thomas Harper’s sermon at the Farm Street Church of the Immaculate Conception during the summer of 1869.

⁴² Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1986), 1.

⁴³ Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, 38.

speakers were publicly and vociferously taking issue with the claims of scientists like John Tyndall, individuals within those religious communities had available to them images that clearly implied the value of materiality. If, as I discuss in the introduction, the human figure of Jesus was held as a model of kind, moral behavior (in addition to being an agent of redemption), this was true largely because of the insistence within all branches of mainstream Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, on the importance of the incarnation of Christ. The image of Christ's humanity, at issue in Vatican I and acknowledged explicitly in the Anglican articles of faith, provided a model of humane morality predicated on material embodiment. I discuss in more detail the connections between human embodiment and theology in Chapter 5, but want here simply to note the presence within the mainstream of both Anglicanism and Catholicism of a more complicated stance on materiality than might be expected, particularly given the responses to scientific thought. While it would be inaccurate to say that Victorian religion valued embodiment or materiality per se, it is fair to suggest their valued presence in terms of both symbol and sacrament.

The Mind-Brain Debate in Victorian Psychology

If religion asks questions concerning the relationship between the material body and the non-material soul, psychology asks similar questions of the invisible processes of the mind. Mid-Victorian psychology developed in large part from physiology, and this foundation in the study of bodily processes is clearly identifiable in much physiological psychology throughout the nineteenth century. In this section, I address nineteenth-century attitudes toward the mind and its processes, and examine the relationship

between body and (non-material) mind.

While nineteenth-century solutions to the seemingly ever-present problem of psychologically unbalanced behavior varied widely, both over time and among individual practitioners, there was a general consensus that so-called “nervous” disorders had physical causes.⁴⁴ George Cheyne, an eighteenth-century “nerve doctor,” claimed that nervous illnesses actually resided in the nerves themselves, and this general claim underlay, in one form or another, most approaches to psychology and psychiatry for the next 150 years.⁴⁵ Benedict-Auguste Morel, a French psychologist, famously declared that the brain was the organ of the soul, while Jean-Martin Charcot, a pathologist, claimed that hysteria was an organic nervous disease.⁴⁶ In stating that “Mental disorders are neither more nor less than nervous diseases in which mental symptoms predominate,” Henry Maudsley articulated the position of essentially all nineteenth-century practitioners, who agreed in general on the physical basis of mental illness.⁴⁷ Insanity, according to Maudsley, used to be a special study because of “the habit of viewing mind as an intangible entity or incorporeal essence, which science inherited from theology . . .

⁴⁴ For an overview of developments within the field of psychology, see Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997). In particular, chapters 1-4 offer useful summaries of mental illnesses as they were conceived before and through the nineteenth century.

⁴⁵ See, for example, George Cheyne, *The English Malady: Or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (1733) (London: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1976). For a discussion of George Cheyne and of the many conditions that were attributed to “nervous” diseases, see Peter Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Culture History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley: U California P, 1997). Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000), discusses the major movements within later nineteenth-century psychology, and traces much of the debate within Victorian psychology over the relationship between body and mind.

⁴⁶ Benedict-Auguste Morel, *Traite des degenerescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espece humaine* (1857).

⁴⁷ Maudsley, *Body and Mind*, 41.

[I]ts disorders were thought to be an incomprehensible affliction, and, in accordance with the theological notion, due to the presence of an evil spirit in the sufferer, or to the enslavement of the soul to sin, or to anything but their true cause – bodily disease.”⁴⁸

Because of the overwhelming amount written on psychology during the nineteenth century, I will confine myself here to two aspects of the field that have particular importance to this study given their association with the tensions between the material and the non-material: association psychology and phrenology. Association psychology, predicated as it is on the idea that mental associations happen spontaneously, may seem at first to be directly opposed to such a materialist “science” as phrenology, yet both integrate the material and the non-material by imagining the body as the site on which a record of the non-material – whether conceived as the personality, experience, or the psyche – is written.⁴⁹

Associationism, as it was articulated by David Hartley, suggests that repeated experiences leave physical traces on the nerves and brain, from which the mind then makes its own new associations, thereby building knowledge. Later associationists built on this basis and discussed the unconscious operations of the mind as important elements in forming mental associations. John Abercrombie notes that facts can be recalled either voluntarily or spontaneously, but links both kinds of memory to the operation of the will, suggesting that even spontaneous recall is controllable except in cases of mental

⁴⁸ Maudsley, *Body and Mind*, 2-3.

⁴⁹ Phrenology falls into the general category of faculty psychology, which overlaps with but also in some ways predates association psychology. Although I discuss association psychology first, I do not mean to suggest thereby that faculty psychology in general, or phrenology more particularly, develops out of association psychology. For a discussion of the relationship between faculty psychology and association psychology, see Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*.

derangement: “In the healthy state of the mind, we can give way to this spontaneous succession of thoughts; or we can check it at our pleasure, and direct the mind into some new train connected with the same subject, or arising out of it; or we can dismiss it altogether.”⁵⁰ Abercrombie notes, though, that this voluntary control of thoughts can be lost in dreams and in states of insanity.

Other associationists reinforced this claim of the unconscious or unintentional mental processes, often claiming that it was only in periods of physical sickness that these hidden points of knowledge could be revealed: William Hamilton, for example, argued that “The evidence on this point shows that the mind frequently contains whole systems of knowledge, which, though in our normal state they have faded into absolute oblivion, may, in certain abnormal states, as madness, febrile delirium, somnambulism, catalepsy, &c., flash out into luminous consciousness.”⁵¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s description of the woman who, during fits of nervous fever, recalled perfectly the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew she had unknowingly picked up as a child living in her uncle’s home as he talked to himself in these languages was retold in ways that suggested both the unconscious workings of the mind and the physical basis of memory. Later scientists, like Herbert Spencer and G. H. Lewes, expanded the concepts of unconscious memory into more explicitly biological models, suggesting that evolution of the organism leads to mental associations as the organism adapts to its particular environment. Lewes also

⁵⁰ John Abercrombie, *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830), 19th ed. (London: John Murray, 1871). Reprinted in Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.), *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998), 77-80; 78.

⁵¹ William Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic* (1859), ed. H. C. Mansel and John Veith, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1861) (in Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, 80-83), 81.

envisioned the development of new ideas in terms that not only suggested the organicism of learning but also insisted upon the materiality of mental processes. Writing that “Habits, Fixed Ideas, and what are called Automatic Actions, all depend on the tendency which a sensation has to discharge itself through the readiest channel,” Lewes envisions mind as thoroughly material: learning new information is difficult “because the channels through which each sensation has to pass have not become established; but no sooner has frequent repetition cut a pathway, than this difficulty vanishes.”⁵² The undirected associations of the mind, acting independently of the will, in early association psychology, here take the shape of a thoroughly material mark left on the brain itself; although perhaps still (at least potentially) undirected by the conscious will, this kind of association bridges the gap between the non-material (ideas) and the material (brain) by envisioning the non-material leaving a written record on the material.

Phrenology, on the other hand, operates on the principle that the brain itself controls an individual’s strengths and weaknesses both moral and intellectual, as well as his or her faculties, propensities, likes, and dislikes. Although occasionally confused with physiognomy, in which the face and body reveal hidden or masked mental or psychological characteristics, phrenology is distinctly different. That is, rather than seeing the external body as a mirror of the otherwise inaccessible soul, phrenology imagines all personal characteristics to have their foundation and source in the brain itself; consequently, the organs of the brain, readable by the shapes they make on the surface of the skull, reveal to a trained reader the potentialities of personality even before

⁵² George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859-60), II, 58. (Reprinted in Taylor and Shuttlesworth, *Embodied Selves*, 87-88), 87.

they are instantiated in behavior. A child's skull could be read in order to determine his or her strengths and weaknesses and to devise an educational plan to promote strengths and mitigate defects. Consequently, phrenology, in direct contrast to association psychology, sees the brain not as the slate upon which experience writes but rather as the innate set of organs that determine future experience.

For Franz Joseph Gall, phrenology provided the answer to the most fundamental questions of identity:

Study the different developments of our cerebral parts, and you will no longer be deceived as to the prime motives which determine your tastes, and your actions; you will judge exactly of your merit and your demerit; you will know the reason, why it does not depend on yourself, that you have such and such a predominant propensity or talent, to become a mathematician, a mechanic, a musician, a poet, or an orator; you will comprehend why you excel, without effort, so to speak, in one thing, whilst in another you are inevitably doomed to mediocrity.⁵³

Ultimately, Gall suggests, the distinction between “the internal man and his external products, between things and their expressions,” will be erased, leaving a world without signs or referents but only things themselves.⁵⁴ The principles of phrenology are a large step toward that goal, since they recognize the ultimate unity between cerebral characteristics and the human faculties and preferences. Because phrenology proves “that the brain is exclusively the organ of the soul,” the skull is the only accessible part of the body that can reveal anything about an individual's qualities; physiognomy, in other words, is useless since it assigns various parts of the body and of the face to particular human characteristics and reads them by analogy rather than, as phrenology does with the

⁵³ Franz Joseph Gall, *On the Functions of the Brain* (1822-5), trans. Winslow Lewis, 6 vols. (Boston: Marsh, Capen, and Lyon, 1835) (reprinted in Taylor and Shuttlesworth, *Embodied Selves*, 25-29), 26.

⁵⁴ Gall, *On the Functions of the Brain* (Taylor and Shuttlesworth, 26).

skull, as evidence of direct cause.

John Caspar Lavater's physiognomical system read the visible surface of the body as a means of revealing the nonmaterial traits of the individual, but unlike phrenology divided human characteristics into three kinds of life and associated each with a section of the body. The highest form of life, the intellectual, was associated with the head; the moral life, which was the middle form, was associated with the heart; and the lowest form of life, the animal, was associated with the genitalia. The whole body, in Lavater's system, could be read for evidence of hidden or masked characteristics. Those characteristics were readable in miniature form as well, as the face came to signify a compressed record of the whole body. The forehead was the image of the intellect; the nose and cheeks that of the moral life; and the chin that of the animal life. If Lavater's system worked by analogy and mirroring, by representation, Gall's system worked through direct evidence: the shape of the skull does not reflect or represent particular characteristics, but rather is the external evidence of the development of particular organs within the brain. If the body *represents* identity of character for Lavater, for Gall it *is* identity.

Sensation and Reason in the Aesthetic Tradition

The field of aesthetics blends many of the concerns about the relationship between body and mind that I have discussed throughout this chapter. Because art – whether literary, pictorial, or other – presents sometimes abstract ideas in necessarily concrete form, aesthetics takes as a central question the relative value of the material and the non-material. More particularly, I end this chapter with a discussion of Victorian

aesthetics because it addresses issues at stake in the other disciplines I have discussed so far: Victorian psychologists and biologists considered the physiological and psychological foundations of individual aesthetic response, while religious groups and leaders argued about the potential moral effects, both positive and negative, of particular works of art. As I note above, Hilary Fraser has pointed out the “natural affinities between religion and art,” which exist because both share a “common endeavour to express and embody non-material ideal truths in physical form.”⁵⁵ In this section, I discuss the relationship between form and content, between material and ideal, within the field of Victorian aesthetics, and in doing so attempt to connect concerns from biology, psychology, and theology with concerns specific to aesthetics in order to demonstrate the degree to which Victorian aesthetics privileged the non-material over the material, while simultaneously (and perhaps surprisingly) making room for embodiment.

The nineteenth century inherited its aesthetic assumptions in large part from eighteenth-century English and German philosophy, in particular from Shaftesbury and, later, from Kant, although other philosophers, including Locke, Hutcheson, Hume, Burke, and Hegel, also influenced Victorian theories of art and beauty. These theorists of the aesthetic, although varying significantly from each other in their details, tend to have overlapping central concerns: the relationship between and the relative value of idea and form in aesthetic objects; the role of the senses in recognizing and responding to the aesthetic, and in making aesthetic judgments; the extent to which aesthetic judgments involve reason or other cognitive processes; and questions of whether aesthetic judgments are immediate (sensory) or mediated (rational).

⁵⁵ Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, 1.

The etymology of the term “aesthetics” reveals its roots in sensation and materiality: “things perceptible by the senses, things material.”⁵⁶ The term was first used by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735 to refer to the knowledge gained through the senses rather than to the systematic study of art and beauty,⁵⁷ but quite quickly gained its current meaning when Kant objected to what he considered a mistranslation and refocused the term to signify the study of sense perception as it relates to judgment. In any case, however, the study of aesthetics assumes the value of the senses in a way that challenged, particularly at the discipline’s beginnings, the assumptions of Descartes regarding the relative poverty of sensory perception as a mode of epistemology.⁵⁸ Baumgarten’s use of the term can be seen to extend the ideas of philosophical empiricists, such as Locke,⁵⁹ against those of the rationalists who maintained, in the Cartesian and Neo-Platonist tradition, that the mind alone constitutes the only reliable means of knowing.

Although the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic philosophers accord different value to the senses, most acknowledge their involvement to some degree in aesthetic experience and judgment. For example, Hume claims that “particular forms or qualities [of objects] . . . are calculated to please, and others to displease,”⁶⁰ suggesting

⁵⁶ “Gr. *aisthetikos*, of or pertaining to *aisthanesthai*, things perceptible by the senses, things material.” “Aesthetics.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

⁵⁷ For more information on Baumgarten and his contributions to aesthetics as a branch of philosophy, see Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), especially Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, 4.

⁵⁹ Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), argues that Locke’s “empirical, subject-based epistemology,” which “privileged individual sense experience” (4) contributed a defense of the value of the senses to later aesthetic philosophy.

⁶⁰ David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary*. Rev. ed. Ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 233.

that these “forms” might be perceptible through the senses. He also associates the quality of beauty with “a mutual relation and correspondence of parts,”⁶¹ again suggesting that beauty can be determined through formal characteristics that appeal to the senses.

Edmund Burke similarly claims that beauty lies in the formal characteristics of an object; associating characteristics such as smallness, smoothness, line, delicacy, and color with beauty, he writes, “I do not now recollect any thing beautiful that is not smooth,” and asserts that beautiful objects exhibit a gradual variation of line, neither completely straight nor abruptly angled; a delicacy of stature (“An appearance of delicacy, and even of fragility, is almost essential” to beauty); and colors that are “clean and fair,” never “dusky or muddy.”⁶² Interestingly, Burke clearly distinguishes between the form of an object (its smoothness, roundness, etc.) and a sense of formal order, which he says is not a requisite characteristic of beauty; this insistence on form rather than order allows him to conclude that aesthetic perception is largely sensory rather than reflective: “It is not by the force of long attention and enquiry that we find any object to be beautiful; beauty demands not assistance from our reasoning.”⁶³ Finally, one of Hegel’s three defining principles of art is that art is made “to be more or less borrowed from the sensuous and addressed to man’s sense;”⁶⁴ that is, art by definition uses materials that are visible or audible, and appeals to (and through) the senses.

⁶¹ Hume, *Essays*, 240.

⁶² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1998), 103-106.

⁶³ Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 84.

⁶⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (originally published as *The Introduction to Hegel’s Philosophy of Fine Arts*, 1886); tr. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood (New York: Penguin, 1993), 30.

Yet in the midst of this acknowledgement of the role of the senses and of sensory perception in the aesthetic, these philosophers almost universally assert the inadequacy of sensation and of sensory perception in forming aesthetic judgments. The Earl of Shaftesbury attributes beauty to perfection of form, but the form he identifies is a wholly rational, rather than sensuous, one: linking concepts of order, proportion, balance, and harmony (which constitute beauty) to mathematics, Shaftesbury identifies the constituent feature of art as “that consummate *Grace*, that Beauty of *Nature*, and that *Perfection* of Numbers, which the rest of Mankind, feeling only by the Effect, whilst ignorant of the Cause, term the *Je-ne-sçay-quoy*, the unintelligible, or the I know not what . . .”⁶⁵ While the characteristics he identifies are based in formal attributes, they are so mediated by rationality as to be almost entirely dependent on cognition rather than on immediate somatic or affective experience. Similarly, Shaftesbury identifies two internal senses – the sense of beauty and the moral sense – and describes them as if they were physical sense organs: “No sooner the *Eye* opens upon Figures, the Ear to *Sounds*, than straight *the Beautiful* results, and *Grace* and *Harmony* are known and acknowledg’d. No sooner are *ACTIONS* view’d, no sooner the *human Affections* and *Passions* discern’d (and they are most of ’em as soon discern’d as felt) than straight *an inward EYE* distinguishes, and sees *the Fair* and *Shapely*, *the Amiable* and *Admirable*, apart from *the Deform’d*, *the Foul*, *the Odious*, or the *Despicable*.”⁶⁶ Further, the perception and knowledge of beauty depend on the subject’s ascent from sense to intellectual perception, much as the artist

⁶⁵ Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (3 vols.), ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 1: 204.

⁶⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 2: 231.

requires “the *Idea* of PERFECTION to give him Aim.”⁶⁷ While recognition of beauty seems instantaneous in Shaftesbury’s formulation (“straight *the Beautiful* results”), that recognition actually moves from pleasure at the immediate object (a beautiful painting; a beautiful person) to recognition of a category (art, which is beautiful by definition; an object animated by the mind, which is the inward and unchanging essence of the person). The recognition of the category is itself an act of reflection and cognition, and in each case the category itself is theoretical rather than sensuous.

Like Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson asserts that it is the reflective act of the perceiving subject that determines the concept of beauty. After claiming that there is no “quality supposed to be in the object which should of itself be beautiful, without relation to any mind which perceives it,” Hutcheson insists that the concept of beauty necessarily “denotes the perception of some mind.”⁶⁸ Because beauty is the perception of a mind, it requires both an object that one perceives through one’s senses and the action of a mind that interprets and recognizes particular qualities. Like Burke, Hutcheson asserts the importance of senses and sensation in the aesthetic experience; however, he differentiates between the external senses and the inward senses, asserting that while the external senses can induce pleasure, the pleasure brought about by the inward senses (such as the sense of beauty) is higher because these senses (which are cognitive, intellectual, and reflective) can process multiple external perceptions at once, thereby compounding the pleasure.

⁶⁷ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1: 204.

⁶⁸ Francis H. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, In Two Treatises* [1726] (ed. Wolfgang Leidhold [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004]), 1: 16.

Similarly, Hume argues that beauty is not a quality in an object but a faculty of the mind: “Beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line *whose* parts are all equally distant from a common center. It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon the mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. In vain would you look for it in the circle, or seek it, either by your senses, or by mathematical reasonings, in all the properties of that figure.”⁶⁹ Hume seems to suggest that, like physical taste, aesthetic taste can be developed and made more sensitive so that a person might accurately perceive the minutest sensual details of an object, and in this sense the aesthetic experience is clearly sensory and somatic; he continues, however, to note that it is no more possible to define absolute beauty than to determine absolute sweetness, suggesting that the evaluative element, which is cognitive and reflective rather than somatic or sensory, is the deciding factor in making aesthetic judgments.⁷⁰ For Hume, beauty causes pleasure while ugliness or deformity causes pain, confirming that aesthetic experiences cause sensations in the perceiving subject. However, he simultaneously argues that “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.”⁷¹ Finally, Hume argues that, while beauty does not inhere in objects, objects appear designed to provoke particular responses, including beauty: “Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are

⁶⁹ Hume, *Essays*, 165.

⁷⁰ Hume, *Essays*, 230.

⁷¹ Hume, *Essays*, 230.

certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce these particular feelings.”⁷² It is thus the interaction between object and subject that produces the experience of beauty.

Like Hume’s, Hegel’s aesthetic theory insists on art’s mediating position between, on one hand, that which is external and sensuous, and, on the other, that which is internal, reflective, and rational or spiritual. For Hegel, the production of art is neither merely sensuous nor merely cognitive: “the spiritual and the sensuous side must in artistic production be as one.”⁷³ Likewise, the experience of beauty is a dialectic between sense perception and rational reflection: “it [the art object] represents even the highest ideas *in sensuous forms*, thereby bringing them nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling.”⁷⁴ However, if the production of art requires union between the spiritual and the sensual, aesthetic judgment requires a greater proportion of mind: “Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby.”⁷⁵ Artistic beauty is higher than natural beauty for Hegel because mind (reason, rationality, cognition) is higher than nature, as the human is higher than the animal: “artistic beauty stands *higher* than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born – born again, that is – of the mind. . . [E]ven a silly fancy such as may pass through a man’s head is *higher* than any product of nature; for such a fancy must at

⁷² Hume, *Essays*, 235.

⁷³ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 44.

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 9.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 4.

least be characterized by intellectual being and by freedom.”⁷⁶ For Hegel, art always gestures beyond itself, beyond its sensuous forms, toward an idea that can be grasped only by the mind: “The artistic semblance has the advantage that in itself it points beyond itself, and refers us away from itself to something spiritual which it is meant to bring before the mind’s eye.”⁷⁷ Because for Hegel “the lowest mode of apprehension . . . is purely sensuous apprehension,”⁷⁸ the sensuousness of art is justified only insofar as that sensuousness ultimately addresses itself to the mind: “[T]he work of art is not only for the *sensuous* apprehension as sensuous object, but its position is of such a kind that as sensuous it is at the same time essentially addressed to the *mind*, that the mind is meant to be affected by it, and to find some sort of satisfaction in it. . . . For the sensuous aspect of the work of art has a right to existence only in so far as it exists for man’s mind, but not in as far as *qua* sensuous thing it has separate existence by itself.”⁷⁹ Clearly, then, while Hegel asserts the foundations of the aesthetic in sense, its value lies exclusively in the extent to which that sensuousness points to intellectual processes beyond itself.

It is Kant, however, whose influence is most strongly felt in this area. In arguing that aesthetic judgment is by definition disinterested, Kant insists that the concept of the aesthetic is determined by reflection rather than the senses. Because aesthetic pleasure is disinterested, and because other pleasures are not, Kant is able finally to separate the aesthetic from the sensual. Bodily or sensory pleasure leads to gratification, which

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 4.

⁷⁷ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 11.

⁷⁸ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 41.

⁷⁹ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 40.

always (and by definition) involves interest. (So too do moral judgments, which means that aesthetic judgment must always be separate from whether an object is good.) For Kant, we take pleasure in an aesthetic object because it is beautiful; we do not judge something to be beautiful because we take pleasure in it. Interest can involve the agreeable (sensations) or the good (concepts), while art and aesthetic judgment must be free from both. In contrast to the agreeable and the good, the beautiful is independent of any desire for the object possessing the beauty: “All interest presupposes a want, and, as the determining ground of assent, it leaves the judgment about the object no longer free.”⁸⁰ It is when the perceiving subject is disinterested that his or her faculties are allowed to play. Like Hume, Kant claims that beautiful objects seem to exist with the purpose of exciting our aesthetic judgment; however, given Kant’s insistence on the separation of interest from the aesthetic experience, objects cannot in fact have such a purpose, or else observers would have an interest in them, thereby removing them from the category of the aesthetic.⁸¹ Such objects that seem designed to excite aesthetic judgment encourage the senses and reflection to work harmoniously, thereby producing the feeling of beauty.

Kant goes even farther, however, claiming that aesthetic judgment must be universal as well as disinterested; consequently, aesthetic judgment contains an ethical component as well. Because all humans have the same basic capacities (senses, reflection, reason, imagination), individual aesthetic judgment presumes universal

⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner P, 1951), 43-44.

⁸¹ This of course is Kant’s understanding of purposiveness without purpose, one of the three constitutive characteristics of the aesthetic.

agreement. If someone with a free, fair, and disinterested judgment judges an object beautiful, he or she believes legitimately that all other impartial and disinterested people will also see the beauty in the object in question: since the judgment “does not rest on any inclination of the subject . . . but since the person who judges feels himself quite *free* as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object, he cannot find the ground of this satisfaction in any private conditions connected with his own subject, and hence it must be regarded as grounded on what he can presuppose in every other person.”⁸² The (potential) universality of aesthetic judgment transforms an individual aesthetic experience into a public one; aesthetic pleasure is thus made potentially accessible to all, and allows (or forces) people to escape their individual and limited perspectives. Because for Kant aesthetic pleasure comes from reflection that can be communicated and thus experienced universally, the experience of beauty is both public and socially beneficial: it converts the inward sensations of the perceiving subject outward and makes them, through the intellectual process of reflection, publicly and universally accessible.

Several decades later, Matthew Arnold expands on Kant’s notions of the public and ethical value of the aesthetic experience, claiming that “it is demanded [of poetry], not only that it shall interest, but also that it shall inspire and rejoice the reader; that it should convey a charm, and infuse delight . . . and it is not enough that the poet should add to the knowledge of men, it is required of him that he should also add to their happiness.”⁸³ For Arnold, art and literature must communicate culture, as he writes in

⁸² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 46.

⁸³ Matthew Arnold, “Essays in Criticism: Second Series” (in *Selected Prose*, ed. P. J. Keating [London: Penguin, 1970]), 42.

“Culture and Anarchy”: “Now, then, is the moment for culture to be of service, culture which believes in making reason and the will of God prevail, believes in perfection . . .”⁸⁴

Clearly, Kant’s insistence on the absence of purpose and interest in the aesthetic object and judgment, respectively, has been left behind; but Arnold’s belief in the ethical effect of art and beauty connects to Kant’s insistence on the publicness of aesthetic experience and on the possibility of art to generate the turning outward of the subject away from his or her private and inward sensations toward other individuals.

Mid- and late-Victorian art criticism often turns on the kinds of moral judgments Arnold makes here, especially in terms of the public effects of art and the power of art to affect both the individual who attends to a particular piece of art and to the broader culture. Robert Buchanan’s “The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti” falls well within the mainstream of Victorian aesthetic criticism and demonstrates many of the concerns I address in this project. In Chapter 4, I connect Buchanan’s article to its objects – that is, to Rossetti and Swinburne; here I want simply to use it as a paradigmatic example of the key concerns within Victorian aesthetics, and to note that Buchanan’s review ties together issues related to scientific materialism and theology as well as aesthetics. Although Buchanan’s review is extreme, and although he eventually retracted most of its most vitriolic charges, the review is still worth modern critical attention because it illustrates the degree to which the conflicts between reason and sensation, intellect and materiality, mind and body structured Victorian thought.

Buchanan’s attack on Rossetti, and on the Pre-Raphaelites more generally, relies almost exclusively on the language of embodiment, and reveals a vexed relationship

⁸⁴ Arnold, “Culture and Anarchy” (in *Selected Prose*), 206.

between soul and body, or in poetic terms between idea and form.⁸⁵ “The fleshly gentlemen,” writes Buchanan, “have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense.”⁸⁶ After stating explicitly that “We are no purists in such matters. We hold the sensual part of our nature to be as holy as the spiritual or intellectual part, and we believe that such things must find their equivalent in all,” Buchanan moves on to his actual point: “but it is neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human, to obtrude such things [i.e., the subject matter of “Jenny”] as the themes of whole poems. It is simply nasty” (FSP 338). This descending hierarchy of value – poetic, manly, human, nasty – structures all of Buchanan’s critique, and each element of this hierarchy corresponds to a declining ratio of soul to body. If, as he makes clear at the end of his review, poetry’s defining quality is the “great Idea” (FSP 347), to which poetic

⁸⁵ *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* traces several meanings of the term “form” in aesthetic philosophy: that which is “equivalent to the *disposition, arrangement, or order of parts*,” “what is *directly given to the senses*,” and “the boundary or contour of an object.” Aristotle used the term to mean “the *conceptual essence of an object*,” which he also called “entelechy.” Finally, Kant used the term to mean the “*contribution of the mind* to the perceived object.” This suggests what a complicated aesthetic term “form” is. As a term used by Buchanan and other Victorian artists and critics, “form” as it relates to poetry seems most closely tied to the first three definitions above: that is, it suggests the ordering and arrangement of the parts of poems as well as the sensory and sensual appeal of the language, rhyme, and meter; in order to make clear both the interconnection and the distinction between these ideas, I have used the term “textuality” to supplement “form” at various places in my argument. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the degree to which Kantian aesthetics inform and underpin much of the objection to Rossetti’s and Swinburne’s poetry, Kant’s understanding of the term “form” does not seem to be what Buchanan has in mind in his critique. “Form in the History of Aesthetics” in Philip P. Wiener (ed.), *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973-74); accessed 14 March 2007 from the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center <<http://etext.virginia.edu/DicHist/dict.html>>.

⁸⁶ Thomas Maitland [Robert Buchanan], “The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti” (*The Contemporary Review* 18 [August-November 1871], 334-350), 335 (in Jerome J. McGann [ed.], *The Rossetti Archive: The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*). Retrieved 22 February 2006 from <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.c7.18.rad.html>>. All quotations from this essay are from the Web version and will be noted parenthetically in the text as FSP.

form is always and necessarily subordinated, then the “nasty” is defined implicitly by its insistence on the physical to the exclusion of that idea. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s primary definition of “nasty” emphasizes its connection to filth and offensiveness, while a later definition explicitly connects nastiness to obscenity. In all of the definitions, however, even those that focus solely on general unpleasantness or annoyance, there is an implicit suggestion of illicit materiality.⁸⁷ Earlier, in an unsigned 1866 review of Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads*, Buchanan had connected an insistence on materiality in Swinburne’s poems to sexual pathology and to filth: in connecting *Poems and Ballads* to Swinburne’s earlier *Chastelard*, Buchanan identifies “that garish land beyond the region of pure thinking” with “the land where Atys became a raving and sexless maniac” (*SCH* 30).⁸⁸ By making the mythical Attis’s castration a consequence of excessive investment in the pleasures of materiality, Buchanan underscores both the abnormality and the danger inherent in sensation.

The nastiness of Rossetti’s subject matter reinforces the pathology Buchanan attributes to the entire group of poets: “[T]he fleshly school of verse-writers are, so to speak, public offenders, because they are diligently spreading the seeds of disease

⁸⁷ “1. Filthy, dirty; *esp.* offensive through filth or dirt.” Subsequent definitions suggest milder criticism: “offensive, annoying; contemptible”; “ill-tempered, spiteful, unkind”; “an unpleasant, contemptible, or cruel person” (definition 2c of “nasty piece [also bit] of work”). Yet in spite of the insistence within these first several definitions that nastiness denotes unkindness or annoyance, the quotations themselves suggest a more fundamental objectionableness related to moral looseness, specifically to illicit sexuality and generalized degeneracy: “A nasty slommicking bit of goods, with her things all hanging about her anyhow” (Henry Mayhew and A. S. Mayhew, *Good Genius* xvi, c. 1850). This connotation is borne out suggestively in the third, and explicitly in the fourth, definitions, which make plain the connection between nastiness and physical repulsiveness and degeneracy: “Offensive to smell or taste; nauseating” and “Morally corrupt; indecent, obscene, lewd.” “Nasty.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Accessed 2 March 2007.

⁸⁸ *Athenaeum*, 4 August 1866 (in Clyde K. Hyder [ed.], *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970]). Subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically as *SCH*.

broadcast wherever they are read and understood. Their complaint too is catching, and carries off many young persons” (FSP 336). The poets’ insistence on representing fleshliness in their subject matter and in the forms of their poetry, itself evidence of their excessive investment in materiality, manifests itself a second time in the form of a contagious malady whose “seeds of disease” travel on the currents of language to infect the public at large. Rossetti’s poetry, like that of Swinburne, is both obscene and pathological, and dangerous on both counts.

The descending list of values – poetic, manly, human – also carries with it consequences for gender. By subordinating “human” to “manly,” Buchanan simultaneously emphasizes the gender system at work in his review and implies that “womanly” falls someplace lower, and this resonates with other terms of his critique. By terming Swinburne’s appreciation of Rossetti’s poems a “hysteria of admiration,” Buchanan feminizes Swinburne and as a consequence makes laughable Swinburne’s aesthetic judgment: hysteria, the province of overly-nervous women, is at best something to be condescended to and at worst a medical condition in need of professional treatment, but it is certainly not a credential for astute judgment, aesthetic or otherwise. Buchanan similarly feminizes Rossetti by identifying him with the female subjects of his poems: “He is the Blessed Damozel” and “he is ‘heaven-born Helen, Sparta’s queen’ . . . he is Lilith . . . he is the rosy Virgin of the poem called Ave, and the Queen in the Staff and Scrip; he is ‘Sister Helen’ melting her waxen man; he is all these, just as surely as he is Mr. Rossetti soliloquizing over Jenny in her London lodging . . .” (FSP 339). The apparent ease with which Rossetti enters the mindset of his female subjects reinforces for Buchanan his fleshliness, his insistence upon the precedence of textuality and poetic form

over idea. Just as significantly, even as Rossetti “is” these women, he is also only himself, “a fleshly person”: “In petticoats or pantaloons, in modern times or in the middle ages, he is just Mr. Rossetti, a fleshly person, with nothing particular to tell us or teach us, with extreme self-control, a strong sense of colour, and a careful choice of diction” (FSP 339). We might set up an explicit series of equations consequent to Buchanan’s formula as follows: Rossetti = the Damozel/Helen/Lilith; therefore, Rossetti = female; Rossetti = fleshly; fleshly = nasty; female = fleshly. This circular series of equations means that to impugn Rossetti’s masculinity, his art, or his virtue is simultaneously to impugn the other two categories as well.⁸⁹ Similarly, Rossetti’s poems evidence “nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane” and “a superfluity of extreme sensibility” (FSP 337).⁹⁰ For Buchanan, art is so closely related to virtue as to be nearly inseparable, as is masculinity: one is first a poet, then a man, then a human being. In the language of

⁸⁹ Thais Morgan, “Victorian Effeminacies” (Richard Dellamora [ed.], *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* [Chicago: U Chicago P, 1999], 109-126), connects masculinity to the concept of virtue: “‘Effeminacy’ in Buchanan’s infamous attack on the Fleshly School carries a complex cultural weight. Its main force does not yet depend on the criterion of sexuality which will emerge so strikingly toward the end of the Victorian period. Rather, Buchanan’s diatribe seeks to revive the traditional politico-moral ideology of civic masculinity” (109).

⁹⁰ The connections between gender, sanity, and economics are explored by Sally Shuttleworth in her studies of nineteenth-century psychology and medicine. Shuttleworth notes that systems of male bodily economy emphasize (self)control, thriftiness, and withholding as necessary elements of bodily and psychological health, while female systems require regular purges to maintain health: “While male health was believed to be based on self-control, woman’s health depended on her very *inability* to control her body” (Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Bronte and Victorian Psychology* [Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996]), 88. As Shuttleworth notes, bodily control is closely associated with sexuality, so that psychological health, moral health, and bodily health can all be monitored and measured through attention to the processes of the sexual organs and systems: “Whereas the primary categories of male sexual dysfunction in the Victorian era, masturbation and spermatorrhea, focused on the male need to retain vital force, to expend capital only in productive fashion, the primary form of female pathology was that of the *retention* of internal secretions” (88). The connection Buchanan makes here, implicit as it is, between Rossetti’s lack of sanity and his “superfluity of . . . sensibility” suggests that Rossetti is mired in the material, controlled by his bodily systems and at their mercy in much the same way women were imagined to be. He mispends his capital both in kind (his “extreme sensibility”) and in degree (his spending is superfluous and excessive), and in so doing calls into question both his sanity and his masculinity.

this review, by associating Rossetti with the fleshliness more commonly attributed to women, Buchanan calls into question Rossetti's art, masculinity, and virtue in one move.

Buchanan's attack relies on a conception of poetry that he articulates only at the very end of this article, one in which idea doesn't simply precede but rather all but eliminates form in terms of relative value in poetry:

The great poet is Dante, full of the thunder of a great Idea; and Milton, unapproachable in the serene white light of thought and sumptuous wealth of style; and Shakspeare [sic], all poets by turns, and all men in succession; and Goethe, always innovating, and ever indifferent to innovation for its own sake; and Wordsworth, clear as crystal and deep as the sea; and Tennyson, with his vivid range, far-piercing sight, and perfect speech; and Browning, great, not by virtue of his eccentricities, but because of his close intellectual grasp.⁹¹ (FSP 347)

For Buchanan, it is intellect – the “great Idea,” “the serene white light of thought,” “far-piercing sight” – that marks the greatest poetry, and it is an absence of this that he marks in the poetry of the fleshly writers. Insofar as textuality and form matter at all, they do so as the vehicles for thought: Wordsworth's language is “clear as crystal,” a means rather than an end in itself, transparent lens rather than opaque object. If “[a] poem is a poem, first as to the soul, next as to the form” (FSP 348), that “next” for Buchanan is far down the relative scale of value. Milton commands “a sumptuous wealth of style” but it is the “serene white light of thought” that makes him a great poet. The medium of poetry – language – ought to be “perfect human speech . . . The soul's speech and the heart's speech are clear, simple, natural, and beautiful . . .” (FSP 346). Because the language of

⁹¹ It is fascinating to note that, even as Buchanan praises the “great Idea” as the only worthy foundation of great poetry, his own discussion is riddled with images of sensation, especially tactility, and embodiment more generally: noise (“thunder,” “speech”), color (“white light,” “clear as crystal”), and general materiality (“sumptuous wealth of style,” “deep as the sea”). Further, these vivid images of materiality are not accidental to his description but instead are fundamental to it: for Buchanan, this suggests, the “great Idea” is understandable primarily in material terms.

poetry ought to be transparent, ought not call attention to itself, the “archaisms” of Rossetti’s poems “are the mere fiddlededeeing of empty heads and hollow hearts” (FSP 346).

While the main concerns of Buchanan’s attack here seem to center on the lack of both sincerity and intellect or thought in the fleshly poetry and its almost exclusive obsession with textuality and poetic form (and with representations of bodily experience and life within the content of the poems), another thread running through this polemic suggests a not altogether complementary problem concerning the absence of sympathy in these poems, articulated most as an absence of proper feeling. The “hollow hearts” Buchanan associates with the self-consciously archaic language of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood may be subordinated syntactically to the “empty heads” he notes first, but the lack of feeling that “hollow hearts” implies seems to upset him more. This is equally true regarding his final verdict on Rossetti’s poems, brought about by a reading of “Jenny:” “But the whole tone, without being more than usually coarse, seems heartless. There is not a drop of piteousness in Mr. Rossetti. He is just to the outcast, even generous; severe to the seducer; sad even at the spectacle of lust in dimity and fine ribbons. Notwithstanding all this, and a certain delicacy and refinement of treatment unusual with this poet, the poem repels and revolts us, and we like Mr. Rossetti least after its perusal” (FSP 344). Buchanan identifies what might be considered an ethical stance in the poem: Rossetti is “just,” “even generous” to Jenny, and he appears “severe” toward the speaker. Yet these presumably laudable moral attitudes are nullified by an absence of correct feeling: the tone is “heartless,” and Rossetti is condemned finally because he reveals himself as having “not a drop of piteousness.” Clearly, right feeling is a far better

indicator for Buchanan of morality than right action, and the absence of pity outweighs in every meaningful way the demonstrated presence of justice or generosity. Rossetti is here convicted not because of what he *does* or even because of what he *thinks* but because of what he *feels*.

Buchanan's polemic is clearly intended to find greatest fault with Rossetti's poetry because of its excessive valuing of materiality; just as clearly, Buchanan associates materiality, especially the materiality of human (particularly female) bodies, with dirt and debasement. In many ways, this association serves as confirmation of the stereotype of Victorian morality I outlined in the introduction, a type of morality that remains at best skeptical of the ability of material embodiment (in this case poetic form) to further morality (the "great Idea"), and at worst determinedly hostile to materiality that is conscious of itself: Buchanan's claim that great poetry should present itself in clear, transparent language insists that the vehicle be as invisible as possible. Simultaneously, however, Buchanan's own language remains anything but transparent, calling attention to itself not only through the actual words (nasty, filth, seeds of disease, hysteria, intellectual hermaphrodite) but also through the allusions (Attis, Gito and Diogenes), which carry his reader both deeper into his argument and outside his text. Even, that is, as Buchanan decries the superficiality and excessive investment in sensation that he finds in Rossetti's poems, his own language serves as inflammatory tool rather than transparent window for his ideas.

My point here is not to deconstruct Buchanan's review but rather to highlight the complexity – one might say confusion – inherent in Victorian attitudes toward materiality and morality. Buchanan's overt purpose (to criticize Rossetti's fleshliness) is somewhat

at odds with his method (the use of sensationalizing words and images). Far from undermining the essay's effectiveness as an example, this conflict makes it paradigmatic of the tension concerning materiality in Victorian culture more generally. In the next four chapters I examine particular literary texts that, often through references to one or more of the discursive areas I discuss in this chapter, suggest surprising possibilities for associating materiality with morality. One of Buchanan's final criticisms of Rossetti might serve as a hint of the kind of moral stance that I locate, throughout the texts I examine in this project, within materiality: in Buchanan's view, Rossetti fails to *feel*. The poetic speaker's justness, even his generosity, does not compensate for his lack of affective response. To state this in perhaps overly simple terms, the speaker, in his response to Jenny, is all mind and no body. As will become clear over the next four chapters, emotional affect overlaps to a great extent with somatic sensation, to the point that in many texts they become almost indistinguishable. While Buchanan's great poem may ostensibly be all idea, this suggests implicitly that, in order to be sympathetic – to be moral – it must have a body.

Chapter 2

Sensation, Sympathy, and Sacramental Writing in *Villette*

Early in her tenure at Madame Beck's Pensionnat de Demoiselles, Lucy Snowe finds herself, not for the first time, the object of Madame Beck's intrusive spying:

I was not angry, and had no wish in the world to leave her. I could hardly get another employer whose yoke would be so light and so easy of carriage; and truly, I liked Madame for her capital sense, whatever I might think of her principles: as to her system, it did me no harm; she might work me with it to her heart's content: nothing would come of the operation. Loverless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse, I turned, then, and fled; descending the stairs with progress as swift and soundless as that of the spider, which at the same instant ran down the banister.

How I laughed when I reached the schoolroom. I knew now she had certainly seen Dr. John in the garden; I knew what her thoughts were. The spectacle of a suspicious nature so far misled by its own inventions, tickled me much. Yet as the laugh died, a kind of wrath smote me, and then bitterness followed: it was the rock struck, and Meribah's waters gushing out. I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them. I cried hot tears; not because Madame mistrusted me – I did not care twopence for her mistrust – but for other reasons. Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature. However, that turmoil subsided: next day I was again Lucy Snowe.¹

Before this incident, Madame Beck has surreptitiously observed Lucy with her children, spied through key holes as Lucy taught, watched Lucy walk in the garden, gone through her pockets, read her memorandum book, and studied her sleeping countenance. As in previous episodes of surveillance, Lucy claims to possess nothing for Madame Beck to find, no secrets that can be revealed through her snooping: Lucy cannot be “worked” by Madame Beck’s “system.” Yet this is not to suggest that Lucy has nothing to reveal. As

¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 110. All references to *Villette* are to this edition, unless otherwise marked, and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

Sally Shuttleworth has demonstrated, sanity for Brontë and her contemporaries was coextensive with the concealment of private identity; one was sane to the extent to which one could present an unreadable exterior to the world, maintaining a private identity inaccessible to viewers from the outside.² In this construction, successful socialization – in fact, sanity itself – depends on being unreadable.

The laughter Lucy has at Madame Beck's expense comes because Lucy sees through her "spectacle": that is, Lucy not only witnesses Madame Beck's (unsuccessful) attempt at stealth, but she also accurately reads her motivation. In her own desire to ferret out information, Madame Beck has made herself transparent and, consequently, vulnerable. Because Lucy is sure that she has nothing to be discovered, she remains safe

² For example, in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996), Shuttleworth notes Esquirol's insistence on self-control as a constituent feature of sanity: "If we return once more to Esquirol's opening statement, we find the rather disturbing suggestion that the notion of psychological normalcy underlying his work is predicated on a condition of concealment. True selfhood is not the naked display of the insane, but rather the artful concealment and dissimulation of the social creature. Although the insane reveal in more vivid outline the real characteristics of man, to become a social being the individual must learn to overlay and disguise these impulses. Indeed, the condition of selfhood is dependent on having something to conceal: it is the very *disjunction* between inner and outer form which creates the self . . . Awareness of an audience, and of one's ability to baffle their penetration, constitutes the essential basis of selfhood" (38). Esquirol himself writes, "What reflections engage the mind of the philosopher, who, turning aside from the tumult of the world, makes the circuit of a House for the insane! He finds there the same ideas, the same errors, the same passions, the same misfortunes, that elsewhere prevail. It is the same world; but its distinctive characters are more noticeable, its features more marked, its colors more vivid, its effects more striking, because man there displays himself in all his nakedness; dissimulating not his thoughts, nor concealing his defects; lending not to his passions seductive charms, nor to his vices deceitful appearances." He goes on to note that, "In these establishments, the social bonds are broken; habits are changed; friendships cease; confidence is destroyed" (Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. E. K. Hunt [Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845], 19, 20). Critical studies of affective and narrative reticence in *Villette* have also highlighted the novel's tendency toward self-concealment. John Kucich, *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens* (Berkeley: U California P, 1987), calls repression "a nineteenth-century strategy for exalting interiority" (2), and argues in part that "Whenever Brontë exalts and admires passion, what fascinates her is its boldness as a diversion, not some kind of privileged relationship to interiority made possible by expression, and denied by reticence" (46). Similarly, Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: U California P, 1992), claims that "Brontë . . . figure[s] authorship in terms of self-'concealment' rather than of self-revelation" (78), and suggests that the use of disguise (including pseudonym as well as more material disguises) functions as "theatrical self-concealment" (87), a concept I discuss at more length below.

from Madame Beck's surveillance. Yet her construction of that sentence – "I cried hot tears; not because Madame mistrusted me – I did not care twopence for her mistrust – but for other reasons" – not only intimates that she has a secret that Madame Beck will not discover, but simultaneously maintains its concealment from her readers. We are left to wonder what the "other reasons" for Lucy's tears might be. If Madame Beck discovers nothing, we as readers discover only that there is something to discover behind Lucy's façade. Lucy remains unreadable, even to us as readers of her autobiography. This issue of unreadability, as well as of narrative withholding (such as Lucy's remark about the unnamed "other reasons"), features prominently in critical response to *Villette*.³ Lucy Snowe is unreliable, some readers suggest, exactly because of the difficulty of determining what she means in sentences like the one above. In addition to narrative withholding, Lucy has been charged with emotional inconsistency: if she usually describes herself as emotionless (as calm and cold as her name would suggest), she nevertheless describes periodic episodes of intense, even overwhelming emotion. The changeability of her emotion – "I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward

³ While Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, presents a positive argument concerning the function of unreadability in *Villette*, a number of other critics assess it as a narrative fault. In an extreme example of such fault-finding, Luann McCracken Fletcher, "Manufactured Marvels, Heretic Narratives, and the Process of Interpretation in *Villette*" (*Studies in English Literature* 32.4 [1992], 723-46), argues that the narrative fractures are evidence that Lucy has a "sado-masochistic personality with strong tendencies toward voyeurism and exhibitionism" (17). In a similar if more moderate interpretation, Michael S. Kearns, *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology* (Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 1987), asserts that the tensions and fractures within the narrative are evidence that Lucy "remains fundamentally confused about her own nature" (157) and that Brontë was "uncertain[] about the psychological reality she want[ed] to portray" (158). While Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2002), is far more positive in her assessment of the novel, she notes that "critics have tended to treat this [narrative] recalcitrance not as meaningful, but as symptomatic; as evidence of Brontë's clumsiness in handling those subjects with which they take her to be concerned" (2). On the other hand, Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2001), argues in opposition that *Villette* relies heavily on reading as epistemologically and hermeneutically effective; and Elizabeth Preston, "Relational Reconsiderations: Reliability, Heterosexuality, and Narrative Authority in *Villette*" (*Style* 30.3 [Fall 1996], 386-408), claims that Brontë "bring[s] her narrator to the point where she withholds nothing" (392).

tumult . . . soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them” – makes her story difficult to interpret, particularly as she generally claims emotionlessness as her real identity: “next day I was again Lucy Snowe.”

These difficulties – narrative reticence, affective inconsistency – only pose problems, however, if we approach *Villette* as a novel about successful reading practices that produce integrated, fully coherent interpretations. While images of reading are central to the novel’s plot (as well as to most scholarly interpretations),⁴ their ubiquity actually calls into question the hermeneutic project predicated on the distance and detachment of vision. In this chapter, I argue that writing displaces reading as the central focus in *Villette*, and that it does so for two reasons: first, the extraordinarily acute and evocative sensation associated with the act of writing bridges the space between body and mind, public and private, materiality and interiority; second, the material textual object itself is invested with sacramental importance.⁵ In *Villette*, writing is neither an arbitrary

⁴ Many critics focus on vision and its relation to reading and interpretation. See for example Ali Behdad, “Visibility, Secrecy, and the Novel: Narrative Power in Brontë and Zola” (*Literature, Interpretation, Theory: LIT* 1.4 [1990], 253-64), who argues that *Villette* is “not only implicated in the panoptic mode of vision” but is itself an example of the “discourse[] of disciplinary power” which works by “remain[ing] invisible in its constant attempt to render everything else visible” (253); similarly, Karen Lawrence, “The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*” (*Tradition and the Talents of Women*, ed. Florence Howe [Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1991], 87-101), argues that “Lucy seems first and foremost a *decoder* of signs, an interpreter of *other* people and events” (87; italics in original), and Sally Shuttleworth, “‘The Surveillance of a Sleepless Eye’: The Constitution of Neurosis in *Villette*” (*One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*, ed. George Levine and Alan Rauch [Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1987], 313-35), connects the rhetoric of a method of reading that penetrates and unveils interiority to medical models of diagnosis. Other prominent readings of the importance of vision and reading in *Villette* include Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*, and Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*.

⁵ Broadly speaking, a sacrament is “the sign of something sacred and hidden;” more specifically, it is an “external sign or ceremony” that confers grace. In the sacramental system, material objects signify spiritual truths; in particular sacraments, material means are used not because spiritual means are inefficacious but because material means constitute “the most appropriate manner of dealing with creatures that are at the same time spiritual and corporeal” (“Sacrament,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*). Sacraments are often taken to be commandments regarding particular ceremonies which Christians are required to fulfill in order to maintain a state of grace, but theologically a sacrament is a material means for the dispensation of grace, and it is in this sense that writing is sacramental in *Villette*.

set of surface signs that obscures some kind of interior reality, nor a transparent doorway providing unmediated access to that reality. Instead, *Villette* presents writing as ideal embodiment.

In arguing for the status of writing as ideal embodiment within *Villette*, this chapter moves through four steps. First, I address the novel's presentation of the insufficiency of vision as the basis of an epistemological system. Second, I identify the presence within *Villette* of a visuality that combines sight with touch, and argue that the novel presents this haptic vision⁶ as both more reliable and more ethical than vision alone. Third, I connect the importance of touch implicit in the haptic vision the novel valorizes to materiality and embodiment, and demonstrate the surprising extent to which Brontë's novel insists upon those characteristics as the bases of moral and ethical behavior. Finally, by identifying the connections between writing and sacramentalism, I demonstrate the extent to which the increasing association of writing with the sacramental replacement of sacrificed bodies insists upon writing – the action and the written text – as ideal embodiment, superceding the value of individual human bodies.

Faulty Epistemology: Vision in *Villette*

Vision operates in a particular mode, one that is different from that of the other senses. It relies on distance rather than immediacy; it does not depend on, indeed cannot function with, direct contact with its object. Vision can be entirely uni-directional, in that the object of sight need not be aware of its status as seen thing or reciprocate the look,

⁶ My use of the concept of haptic visuality owes much to Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2002).

and it can be blocked more effectively through the subject's own agency than most other senses: one need simply close one's eyes or look away in order to refuse to see, while other senses, especially touch, hearing, and smell, are more difficult to block effectively. Traditionally associated with intellect and cognition rather than with emotion, vision consequently seems to have less affinity with either affective or physiological responses than other senses; finally, it is less easily dissociated from agency and choice than are other senses, in that, due to distance and the sensory control described above, it is more difficult for objects of sight to force themselves on the sensing subject than it is for smells or sounds.⁷

If it is true that *Villette* is saturated with the visual, it is also true that the visual is consistently undermined and questioned.⁸ The novel continually directs readers (and

⁷ G. F. W. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (originally published as *The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Arts*, 1886; tr. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood [New York: Penguin, 1993]), claims that, of the senses, only vision and hearing are available for aesthetic appeal, since the other senses are irremediably and unmixedly material, with no connection to the intellect. In addition, Julius Bernstein, *The Five Senses of Man* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1876), connects vision to intellect and reflection while suggesting that other senses are less available to the intellect. For current critical discussions of the connections between various bodily senses and affective and cognitive responses, see William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1997). Miller notes the difficulty with which disgust can be prompted by visual stimuli, except insofar as what is seen suggests the tactile. Miller's argument links the senses to affective responses, particularly (although not exclusively) to disgust, and notes that the sense most likely to produce disgust is touch, followed closely by smell and then taste. Vision and hearing, in Miller's analysis, provoke disgust only through their evocation of touch or, perhaps, smell. Using the example of horror movies, which operate only through vision and sound, Miller argues that they produce horror and disgust through their presentation of images and, occasionally, sounds that suggest other sensory experiences associated with disgust: decomposition, death, dismemberment, hairiness, scaliness, sliminess, etc.

⁸ Given the ubiquity of representations of vision in *Villette*, it is perhaps surprising how little critical consensus exists regarding its significance. Issues of vision and reading have spawned widely divergent interpretations: some identify Lucy as neurotically unstable or the novel as hopelessly flawed; others assert the clean and absolute alignment of vision and knowledge; still others claim that visual cues are always misleading. Jessica Brent, "Held Captive to a Picture: Visual Experience in Nineteenth-Century Texts and Early Film" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2003), notes that much critical attention to *Villette* "tend[s] to focus on modes of vision (spying, voyeurism, surveillance) that *produce* rather than disrupt narrative," going on to argue instead that a "persistent alternative visuality remains, haunting the text and disrupting the program of narrative coherence and subjectivity" (72). Christina Crosby's study of *Villette* as a Gothic text, "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text" (*Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900* 24.4 [1984],

characters) to fix their attention on sights within the novel, to approach the world through what their eyes perceive. Yet at the same time, it questions the visual in at least three important ways: vision is disrupted and disordered so routinely and to such an extent that the line between what is seen and what is imagined is thoroughly unsettled; the knowledge gained through vision is generally banal and inconsequential, so that even when one's eyes are not deceived by illusion what one sees reveals little of importance; even (or especially) in a system in which vision functions effectively, the result is isolation rather than human connection. Vision, that is, is presented as alternately disorienting, meaningless, and alienating.

What one sees (or seems to see) in *Villette* is notoriously unreliable.⁹ Lucy's vision is repeatedly disrupted in ways that undermine the association between vision and knowledge. The nun is certainly one of the primary elements of the novel that calls into question both Lucy's reliability as a narrator and the accuracy of her vision. Interpretable

701-15), has been one of the most useful critical approaches regarding the correspondence or discrepancy between the visual surfaces in the novel (including that which is visually accessible about people) and hidden psychological interiority or meaning in that she argues for the value of the representational object itself: Crosby notes the importance of the "moments in the text which compromise these oppositions [between "the falseness of surface appearance" and "the truth of hidden depths"] and suggest that consciousness, truth, and reality are intimately and irrevocably related to their secondary and debased opposites: the unconscious, artifice, and representation" (702). Additionally, although I disagree with both of their conclusions regarding the role of reading in *Villette*, Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, and Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1995), are enormously useful in understanding the ways in which vision, imagination, reading, and illness were imagined during the nineteenth century. In particular, Shuttleworth's claims that early- and mid-Victorian science established the importance of vision as a hermeneutic tool, and that Dr. John stands as the novel's chief representative of that kind of knowledge, helped me to articulate my own critique of reading. Vrettos's argument discusses Herbert Spencer's understanding of women as the best readers of the body's signs and simultaneously the principal objects of that analytical gaze, and connects Spencer's ideas to *Villette*'s use of vision in relation to the novel's medical, moral, and social analysis.

⁹ Brent, "Held Captive to a Picture," notes "*Villette*'s simultaneous preoccupation with and repudiation of visual experience," arguing that Brontë's "novels often convey a deep – and typically Protestant – mistrust of the visible world, and a bias toward the plain-spoken word" (72).

as ghost, hallucination, outward manifestation of Lucy's neurosis, mistaken identity, and disguise, the nun can perhaps finally be reduced to none of these categories. Literally a disguise for a man seeking unauthorized access to the female student he is courting, the nun is also either associated, confused, or identified with other figures: a personage from legend, a former beloved of Paul Emanuel's, the singular embodiment of the convent-turned-pensionnat's past residents, an exteriorized personification of Lucy's enforced solitude and permanent celibacy, a hallucination brought on by Lucy's traumatic confinement to the attic, and a personification of the restrictions placed on women by Catholicism. The novel implies that the nun might be any, all, or none of these before the final resolution solves the mystery. Because the mystery of the nun's identity is resolved in such a banal way – shreds of fabric from the Count de Hamal's disguise – readers consistently interpret the nun as having other, less obvious significance, usually having to do with questioning Lucy's reliability both as observer and as narrator. In order to put the encounters with the nun in the context of my argument concerning vision, interpretation, materiality, and embodiment, which I do later in this chapter, I want here to examine other instances in which Lucy's vision is called into question as a reliable method by which to gain access to truth or reality.

The apparitional figure of the nun recalls other assaults on Lucy's vision by spectral images. After the long vacation with the crétin and her subsequent collapse, Lucy regains consciousness but cannot determine her location through vision: "In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face Bretton! Bretton! And ten years ago shone reflected in the mirror. And why did

Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus? Why, if they came at all, did they not return complete? Why hovered before my distempered vision the mere furniture, while the rooms and the locality were gone?" (156-59). In her study of nineteenth-century technologies of realism, Nancy Armstrong has noted the close association between seeing and knowing as a basis for Victorian photographic realism. She writes that "photography was only reproducing a well-established relationship between seeing an object and knowing an object," suggesting a close epistemological reliance on vision. Yet she goes on to note that, as the nineteenth century progressed, "optical science and aesthetics came to think of the eye as increasingly embedded in a highly individuated physical body subject to mood swings, flagging attentiveness, hallucinations, and a variety of outside pressures; it was no longer anything like the sensory receptor that simply saw whatever was out there to be seen."¹⁰ In this sense, Lucy's vision appears embedded in a cultural setting that imagines vision to be as straightforward as Armstrong's description of photographic realism, while at the same time she experiences her own vision much more ambiguously, certainly not as an objective, neutral recorder of verifiable reality. In this passage, Lucy is spectral, as is her location; her appearance is not "natural," and even time has shifted unaccountably. Vision here is "distempered," suggesting a disruption in both cognition and affect; along with the reversed images of mirrored reflections, it leads to a sense of displacement and alienation from self rather than useful knowledge. Lucy's later half-recognition of her own reflection at the theater reinforces this sense of

¹⁰ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1999), 76-77. This assessment of the embeddedness of vision echoes what Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1990), connects to the figure of the "observer," the one who "sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations" (6).

alienation from self as well as the potential unreliability of vision: if a well-constructed exterior can baffle the intrusive, analytical gaze of others, in this case Lucy's gaze of (presumed) recognition is similarly baffled. The estrangement Lucy experiences here – both the unfamiliarity and the strangeness, the oddness, of the reflection – alienates her from herself, making vision an obstacle to, rather than an aide for, knowledge.¹¹

Given Paul Emanuel's propensity to monitor the goings on at the pensionnat and elsewhere, it is not surprising that he is associated so closely with surveillance specifically and with the novel's investment in vision more generally. However, even when Paul is most firmly enmeshed in the register of the visual – when he is thoroughly participating in the project of interpretive reading based on detached visual observation – his readings call attention to their own insufficiency and, consequently, to the insufficiency of a hermeneutic and epistemological enterprise based entirely on vision and imagination.

When Lucy arrives at the Rue Fossette asking for employment, Madame Beck calls on Paul to read Lucy's physiognomy and give advice about hiring her:

'Mon cousin,' began Madame, 'I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance.' The little man fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him. 'I read it,' he pronounced. 'Et qu'en dites-vous?' 'Mais – bien des choses,' was the oracular answer. 'Bad or good?' 'Of each kind, without doubt,' pursued the diviner. 'May one trust her word?' 'Are you negotiating a matter of importance?' 'She wishes me to engage her as bonne

¹¹ Another obvious example of disrupted vision is, of course, the fete at the park, which Lucy experiences as hallucination because of Madame Beck's opiate, but this episode does more than merely provide an example of Gothicized sensation. Lucy's "distempered" vision at the park is not responsible for the major misinterpretation she makes regarding the relationship between Paul Emanuel and Justine Marie, which suggests a fundamental error in aligning vision and knowledge in an unproblematic equation. I discuss this scene at more length below, but mention it here as simply another instance in which the epistemological value of vision is problematized.

or *gouvernante*; tells a tale full of integrity, but gives no reference.’ . . . He gazed steadily. ‘Do you need her services?’ ‘I could do with them. You know I am disgusted with Madame Svini.’ Still he scrutinized. The judgment, when it at last came, was as indefinite as what had gone before it. ‘Engage her. If good predominates in that nature, the action will bring its own reward; if evil – eh bien! Ma cousine, ç sera toujours une bonne oeuvre.’ And with a bow and a ‘bon soir,’ this vague arbiter of my destiny vanished. (60-61)

If Paul’s face “seem[s] to say he meant to see through” Lucy, some critics have taken this to be what actually happens in this scene. Nicholas Dames has gone so far as to say that “Lucy is literally transparent, completely unveiled, by M. Paul’s gaze, and the reading he produces is validated by the narrative itself, as it is in almost every case.”¹² Yet the “reading” Paul makes of Lucy’s face is, as Lucy accurately notes, “indefinite”: he sees many things (“bien des choses”) both good and bad, and his advice seems based more on Madame Beck’s pragmatic needs than on anything he discovers in Lucy’s physiognomy. Lucy, who is narrating a past event that took place before she understood the French that is spoken in this scene, describes Paul Emanuel’s reading ironically; in a manner consistent with their later interaction, Lucy’s description of him as an “oracular” “diviner” satirizes both his intention and his method. His conclusion has nothing to do with whether Lucy is honest, whether her story is true, or whether she will be a good employee: instead, he advises Madame Beck to hire her because she might be good and, if she proves not to be, Madame Beck will be performing an act of charity. Hardly conclusive, Paul’s reading does not make Lucy “transparent” at all. Instead, the reading itself – and Lucy’s tone of dry, acerbic satire as she describes it retrospectively – makes clear just how insubstantial the system is upon which it is based.

¹² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 82-83.

Because for Brontë sanity requires preserving the inviolability of one's psychic interior, even as social functioning requires one to read others, social interactions predicated on vision and reading almost necessarily demand dissimulation and distance, eliminating the possibility of intimacy and almost guaranteeing the incompleteness (if not the actual inaccuracy) of what is seen. Lucy repeatedly assumes a role, a public persona, which allows her the privacy she would otherwise not have. In addition to her theatrical role as the suitor in the vaudeville de pensionnat, Lucy plays other roles, most notably the role of plain, quiet, unprepossessing Lucy Snowe. By assuming this disguise, Lucy guards herself while allowing others to think there is nothing to see.¹³ The role is self-perpetuating, however, and removes the possibility of personal connection or affective fulfillment. In the sense that Lucy keeps everyone at a distance, convincing them that she is nobody, she successfully participates in the epistemology of vision. To the extent that (successful) participation in it results inevitably in self-isolation, the novel itself critiques such an epistemological system.¹⁴

Lucy seems fully immersed, particularly in the first half of the novel, in the project of surveillance even as she claims to deplore its intrusiveness and lack of respect for privacy and personal interiority. Amanda Anderson has argued that *Villette* “constitutes both an analysis and a phenomenology of detachment in its use of the framework of cosmopolitan comparison to register a range of practices that rely upon

¹³ Litvak, *Caught in the Act*, discusses the utility of theatricality as a form of strategic self-concealment.

¹⁴ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2001), argues that “the novel is in fact ruthless in its portrayals of the serious emotional and psychological liabilities of Lucy’s conscious cultivation of detachment” (59). I disagree with Anderson’s emphasis on Lucy’s philosophical alignment with the project of detachment, as I argue throughout this chapter, but I agree with her assessment of the novel’s “ruthless[ness]” concerning the personal consequences of that project.

cultivated distance, including professional disinterestedness, surveillance, impersonal motherhood, aesthetic observation, and stoicism.”¹⁵ As narrator, Lucy establishes the association between vision and interpretation at the very beginning of her narrative, as well as the association between that stance of detached observation and her professed lack of sympathy. The child Lucy approaches the presence of new furniture in her room as “signs and tokens” (4) to be read dispassionately and objectively, rather than acknowledging them as hints of impending emotional upheaval, and she distinguishes herself from Polly, whom she watches with the same sort of detached, analytical gaze, by noting that Polly “endured agony” when her father left a second time, while “I, Lucy Snowe, was calm” (19). Later, Lucy deploys a similar kind of unsympathizing, evaluating gaze on Ginevra before Ginevra goes to a dinner party, a gaze that Ginevra not only tolerates but seeks out:¹⁶

[O]ne evening, when she was going to a large party, for which particular care and elegance of costume were demanded, she could not resist coming to my chamber to show herself in all her splendor. Beautiful she looked: so young, so fresh, and with a delicacy of skin and flexibility of shape altogether English, and not found in the list of Continental female charms . . . I viewed her from top to toe. She turned airily round that I might survey her on all sides . . . I said, ‘Steady! Let us be steady, and know what we are about, and find the meaning of our magnificence’ – and so put her off at arm’s length, to undergo cooler inspection. (80-81)

Ginevra’s desire to be admired is met with Lucy’s silent admiration of her beauty and with her spoken evaluation and interpretation: let us be steady, let us know, let us find the meaning. This scene’s distance – literal and figurative – and its tendency toward

¹⁵ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance*, 36.

¹⁶ Brent, “Held Captive to a Picture,” argues of this scene that it reveals only Lucy’s fundamental lack of sympathy, along with the novel’s use of the visual to interrupt narrative.

interpretation make it a paradigmatic episode of reading, one which highlights Lucy's self-professed lack of emotional responsiveness to others and her lack of warmth and sympathy generally. The relationship that Lucy cultivates with Ginevra is one in which Lucy establishes herself as cool and distant to Ginevra's teasing intimacy. From the beginning of the novel, then, Lucy's interpretive glances both hold the world at a distance (and consequently avoid sympathetic connection to or interest in others) and seek to analyze and interpret it.

Lucy guards herself against the observation of others, successfully preventing them from reading her even as she observes them. During her performance in the vaudeville de pensionnat, Lucy finds her position on stage to be a prime location from which to observe the audience, particularly Dr. John as he watches Ginevra. Similarly, on her first day of teaching, Lucy performs the role of instructor for the first time and finds herself both the object of her audience's direct and evaluative looks and in prime position to evaluate them visually as well: "The first glance informed me that many of the pupils were more than girls – quite young women . . . As I mounted the *estrade* . . . where stood the teacher's chair and desk, I beheld opposite to me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather – eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble . . . I never saw such eyes and brows in England" (72). Lucy's physiognomical reading of her students assesses their character ("insolent") and nationality (not English) through attention to their eyes and brows, which in Lavater's¹⁷ system reflect their intellect. Her students' insolence seems contained at least partially in the fact that they gaze directly back at her: the interpretive, assessing gaze may always be intrusive, but it

¹⁷ I discuss Johann Caspar Lavater's system of physiognomy in Chapter 1.

is inescapably rude when directed by a subordinate to one in authority. Equally concealed in her vaudeville character's costume, on the teaching *estrade* in her classroom, and in her daily assumption of the character of "Lucy Snowe," Lucy shields herself from the prying interpretive gaze of those around her, particularly Madame Beck, while simultaneously attempting to read others.¹⁸ Although Lucy occasionally falls victim to intimacy with Ginevra or Polly, her efforts seem consistently aimed at interpretation and simultaneous self-concealment. In her interactions with others, whether professional or personal, Lucy employs her reading skills to find the meaning of a given situation rather than to experience it directly, and she further distances herself by approaching her public identity as a role, a mask that guards her private identity. In Lucy's self-presentation, as in the novel generally, watching is incompatible with participation and interpreting is incompatible with intimacy: reading is opposed consistently to developing sympathy.

¹⁸ Ginevra Fanshawe seems to exempt herself from this suspicious system of observation and self-concealment, and it may be that very refusal (or inability) to participate that marks her as immature. For example, when Lucy attends the concert with Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton, she notices as Ginevra makes the mistake that permanently alienates her from Dr. John's affections: Ginevra, sitting with an acquaintance at some distance from the Brettons and Lucy, "raised a glass to examine his mother [Mrs. Bretton]; a minute or two afterward she laughingly whispered her neighbor [sic]" (203). Dr. John is offended on his mother's behalf by Ginevra's mockery, indicated by both the obviousness of the observation and the laugh, and he suggests that had she not created a "spectacle" (203), her glance alone would not have been offensive. As was the case with Madame Beck in the passage with which I opened this chapter, Ginevra's "spectacle" seems to consist of having been caught looking. Either Ginevra is unable to conceal herself and her motivations, or she does not care to do so. In either case, her transparency places her outside the bounds of the respectable within this visual system. It is not so much that Ginevra is watching Dr. John and his mother; rather, it is that she is caught doing so. Meanwhile, Lucy keeps "rather in the shade and out of sight" as she watches Ginevra watch the Brettons; and Mrs. Bretton outplays them all by noticing Ginevra's observation without betraying her awareness either to her son or to Lucy, both of whom are unaware of her knowledge until later.

His Eyes Hit Right Against My Own: Haptic Visuality

As this discussion suggests, *Villette* seems intent, at first glance, on establishing and maintaining the straightforward connection between vision and truth, between seeing and knowing. Yet, as I suggested, this connection is consistently undermined throughout the novel, and is replaced by a form of vision that is much more tactile, even synaesthetic. Paul Emanuel is generally thought to reside firmly in the realm of the visual, and to remain throughout the novel aligned with the analogous projects of surveillance and reading.¹⁹ Yet, while he is always a participant in an epistemological and hermeneutic system predicated on vision, he is far more nuanced than such a depiction suggests. Vision is never displaced from a position of prominence in Paul Emanuel's characterization, but far from instantiating a detached, purely imaginative visual program, he instead provides the novel's most compelling example of fully embodied vision that participates in multiple senses at once, vision that might be called synaesthetic as well as corporeal.

From his examination of Lucy's countenance on her first evening at the pensionnat, to his observation from his room at the college next door, to his inspection of Lucy's desk, Paul is an active participant in the system of surveillance and reading presented in the novel, and, like Madame Beck and Père Silas, he is often the object of Lucy's criticism because of his intrusiveness and lack of respect for privacy. As the narrative progresses, however, Paul's vision becomes more complex, and it comes to take

¹⁹ See, for example, Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, and Shuttleworth, "'The Surveillance of a Sleepless Eye'."

on more of what might be termed tactile: his eyes touch what they see.²⁰ This complication of Paul's vision in many ways follows and develops with Lucy's attention to his eyeglasses. Shortly after Lucy recognizes Graham's utter failure to perceive her true character, she begins to pay particular attention to Paul's spectacles, his *lunettes*. At first, the *lunettes* appear to keep others at a distance, allow Paul the distance and detachment necessary for thorough visual inspection: "[T]hese utensils had in them a blank and immutable terror, beyond the mobile wrath of the wearer's own unglazed eyes" (307). Paul's glasses characterize him as both unsignifying – his face is an unreadable, unmeaning (except insofar as it provokes terror) surface – and unperceptive – sight and sound are both reduced. However, Paul's *lunettes*, and his vision more generally, are more complicated than this apparently straightforward association with distance and detachment would suggest. First, while the spectacles reinforce Paul's alignment with a program of detached visual surveillance, they also highlight the tactility of his vision: Lucy calls them "dart-dealing spectacles" (305), suggesting along with the hostility of Paul's glance a sense of material contact as well. Further, when Lucy actually meets Paul's gaze in this scene, she experiences that eye-contact tangibly: "Twice did I enjoy this side view with impunity, advancing and receding unseen; the third time my eye had scarce dawned beyond the obscuration of the desk, when it was caught and transfixed

²⁰ Others have noted the possible confluence of the visual and the tactile, both in regards to nineteenth-century fiction and *Villette* and more generally in terms of the science of sensory perception. In discussing the kinds of gazes at work in *The Professor*, Nicholas Dames identifies "the mixture of the tactile and visual in phrenological practice, in which visual examination could often be supplemented by the use of calipers or direct application of the hands" (Dames, *Amnesiac Selves* 109). Yet the tactility of vision I ascribe to Paul Emanuel is of a different sort altogether, and it is important to note that his examination of Lucy at the beginning is based on physiognomy rather than phrenology, and so is completely visual, without even the implication of touch that Dames identifies here. When Paul's vision becomes tactile, it does so not by connecting eyes and hands but by making the eyes themselves agents of touch.

through its very pupil – transfixed by the *lunettes*” (307). Still distant, Paul’s eyesight here seems as tactile as it is visual. Second, while the *lunettes* insist upon distance, they are removable, not actually part of Paul’s vision. Lucy continues, “I now found the advantage of proximity: these shortsighted *lunettes* were useless for the inspection of a criminal under Monsieur’s nose; accordingly, he doffed them, and he and I stood on more equal terms” (307). That Paul wears these glasses is suggestive of a character fully immersed in the visual program of surveillance and detachment; that he takes them off, allowing Lucy to stand “on more equal terms” with him, suggests an ability to shift registers away from detached vision and toward tactility.

Additionally, Lucy detects Paul Emanuel’s benevolence by means of vision and its complications. When Lucy has returned to the pensionnat and is feeling particularly bereft of the friendship of the Brettons to which she had become comfortably accustomed, she again finds herself the object of Paul’s gaze:

Piercing the same wall, and close beside the stove, was a window, looking also into the carré; as I looked up a cap tassel, a brow, two eyes filled a pane of that window; the fixed gaze of those two eyes hit right against my own glance: they were watching me. I had not till that moment known that tears were on my cheek, but I felt them now. This was a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine. And this new, this outdoor, this male spy, what business had brought him to the premises at this unwonted hour? . . . It was very much his habit to wear eyes before, behind, and on each side of him: he had seen me through the little window – he now opened the refectory door, and there he stood. (218)

Once again, Lucy is watching someone who is in turn watching someone (else), except this time she is seen. Paul Emanuel’s gaze, while obviously visual, is also tactile – his eyes “hit right against” Lucy’s own gaze; the contact makes Lucy aware of other things that touch her skin, specifically tears. Lucy feels Paul’s glance, and that feeling of tactile

contact makes her aware of the rest of her skin, and the tears that touch it. In many ways, this passage is emblematic of the intrusiveness of vision: Paul Emanuel is spying on Lucy, and his intrusion on her sadness disrupts any sense of privacy she has: “no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and divine.” Yet, although Lucy rejects Paul Emanuel’s attempts to talk to her, characterizing his entire involvement as intrusive, his presence here is less an attempt to gather information and interpret than it is an observation of the evidence of sadness and an attempt to provide comfort. Lucy mistakes (or claims to have mistaken at the time) the “insinuating softness” (219) of his attempts at conversation for the attempts of a spy “to note and to divine” potentially revealing information about her, but the kind of gaze Paul Emanuel directs at Lucy here – tactile and immediate rather than detached and cool – is categorically different from the kind of glance associated with the information-gathering, hermeneutic enterprise of spying.

“Donnez-moi la main”: Paul Emanuel’s Tactile Ethics

Lucy’s attention to Paul Emanuel chronicles the shift in his mode of seeing from one that is purely visual (and distant) to one that is complicated and vexed by new associations with immediacy and touch. At the same time, her narrative reveals that Paul’s participation in her life – his surveillance, if you will – moves from the purely visual and imaginative to the direct and material. Paul’s inspection of Lucy begins as a purely visual exercise, but quite quickly proceeds into the realm of touch. Shifting from a visual examination of Lucy’s face, Paul begins to go through Lucy’s desk routinely:

Now I knew, and had long known, that the hand of M. Emanuel’s was on

intimate terms with my desk; that it raised and lowered the lid, ransacked and arranged the contents, almost as familiarly as my own. The fact was not dubious, nor did he wish it to be so: he left signs of each visit palpable and unmistakable; hitherto, however, I had never caught him in the act: watch as I would, I could not detect the hours and moments of his coming. I saw the brownie's work, in exercises left overnight full of faults, and found next morning carefully corrected: I profited by his capricious goodwill in loans full welcome and refreshing. Between a sallow dictionary and worn-out grammar would magically grow a fresh interesting new work, or a classic, mellow and sweet in its ripe age. Out of my work basket would laughingly peep a romance, under it would lurk the pamphlet, the magazine, whence last evening's reading had been extracted. Impossible to doubt the source whence these treasures flowed: had there been no other indication, one condemning and traitor peculiarity common to them all, settled the question – *they smelt of cigars*. . . (323, italics in original)

It is Paul Emanuel's hand here that investigates rather than his eyes, suggesting greater intrusiveness but simultaneously increased intimacy and familiarity: it is not just Paul's mind, but his body itself that is "on intimate terms" with Lucy's belongings. His hands open and close the desk, assuming a right of access to the desk's interior and contents. As intrusive as Paul's visual examination was, this is far more so: the image of opening, rifling, touching private objects inside the desk seems far more disturbing than his visual examination of her on her first evening at Madame Beck's. Yet, Lucy is far from disturbed by Paul's unseen but felt presence. She calls him a "brownie," a diminutive and genial if mischievous spirit, but the language is biblical: Lucy cannot "detect the hours and moments of his coming," a phrase that recalls Jesus's parable about the coming of the Son of Man: "No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come" (Mark 13:32). Further, the intrusion here, far from being secret, intentionally leaves "palpable" traces for Lucy to find and feel; it is important that the "signs" of Paul's physical presence are there for Lucy to feel, to experience somatically through touch and even through smell, rather than to read imaginatively or cognitively. Finally, Lucy benefits

materially and psychologically from Paul's presence: the books he leaves and the assistance to her work are "full welcome and refreshing." The benefits he tenders are not trivial or minor but substantive and substantial.²¹ The combination of language, suggesting on one hand a friendly, diminutive creature who helps Lucy, and, on the other, the presence of divinity, underscores the materiality of the help as well as the recognizable traces left by Paul's presence.

In the relationship between Paul and Lucy, *Villette* articulates an alternative to the distance identified with its system of vision and reading. Touch – physical contact between their bodies – connects Lucy and Paul far more effectively than the visual system at work in so much of the novel, and consequently questions the possibility of an ethics predicated on the distance of vision even as it presents materiality and touch as potentially ethical. Twice M. Paul says to Lucy, "Donnez-moi la main" (144, 359); both instances cement their growing trust. When Paul accuses Lucy of wanting the acclaim that will come from successfully conducting the examination of her students in English, Lucy responds that she dislikes even the thought of such attention, and that she cares nothing for the goodwill of an audience comprised of strangers. The resulting tension and anger between them is dissipated through touch:

'Donnez-moi la main,' said he, and the spite and jealousy melted out of his face, and a generous kindness shone there instead. 'Come, we will not be rivals, we will be friends,' he pursued. 'The examination shall take place, and I will choose a good moment; and instead of vexing and hindering, as I felt half inclined ten minutes ago – for I have my malevolent moods: I always

²¹ These benefits of Paul's unseen presence echo the comfort Lucy receives from letters: Graham's first letter is like "the wild savory mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining" (225), while those that come from Paul himself "were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed" (462). I discuss the value of letters at length below, but want here to draw attention to the overlaps in signification between material bodies and written text, as well as the comfort given by both.

had, from childhood – I will aid you sincerely. After all, you are solitary and a stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known. We will be friends: do you agree?” (144).

What Lucy perceives in Paul’s face before this exchange is arrogance and pride; after they clasp hands, she sees “generous kindness.” How Lucy reads Paul changes immediately upon the contact of their hands, suggesting that touch not only fosters a changed, and improved, relationship, but that it also affects what and how one reads. Later, at the picnic for his birthday, Paul again takes Lucy’s hand in a gesture that both demonstrates and builds their connection to one another: “Indeed, at the worst, it was only his nerves that were irritable, not his temper that was radically bad; soothe, comprehend, comfort him, and he was a lamb; he would not harm a fly. Only to the very stupid, perverse, or unsympathizing, was he in the slightest degree dangerous. . . his eyes met my smile; he just stretched out his kind hand, saying, ‘Donnez-moi la main! I see we worship the same God, in the same spirit, though by different rites’” (359).

Additionally, the “affinity” Paul recognizes with Lucy is apparent to him through multiple senses; although one of those senses is vision, it operates synaesthetically with touch, hearing, and a generalized somatic perception:

‘I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and placid, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike – there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine – that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. Yes, you were born under my star! Tremble! For where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle; knottings and catchings occur – sudden breaks leave damage in the web.’ (345)

The first means of detecting “affinity” is visual: “Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you

look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine – that your eyes are cut like mine?” Quickly, however, the connections move to other senses, such as tone of voice, ending with highly suggestive images of connection through touch: the threads of their lives are intertwined, “difficult to disentangle” and full of “knottings and catchings.” The affinity between these two is made apparent essentially without the use of vision, and it is enacted through the material contact of touch, both the touch of their hands and the tangle of the “threads of their destinies.” Touch also signifies the shift in their relationship: “But through his touch, and with his words, a new feeling and a strange thought found a course. Could it be that he was becoming more than friend or brother? Did his look speak a kindness beyond fraternity or amity? His eloquent look had more to say, his hand drew me forward, his interpreting lips stirred. No. Not now. Here into the twilight alley broke an interruption . . .” (414-15). Lucy notes here that Paul’s “look” may be communicative, but it is his hand that “dr[aws her] forward.”

Further, Lucy recognizes Paul nonvisually – through sound and through touch – and this recognition provides the basis for an alternative method of reading. Although Lucy is not expecting M. Paul – thinks, in fact, that he has sailed for Basseterre without having had the opportunity to say goodbye – she registers the sound of his shoes as well as an inexplicable and generalized “thrill:”

While tying on my bonnet, which had hitherto hung by its ribbons from my idle hand, I vaguely and momentarily wondered to hear the stop of but one *ouvrier*. I noted, too – as captives in dungeons find sometimes dreary leisure to note the merest trifles – that this man wore shoes, and not sabots: I concluded that it must be the master carpenter, coming to inspect, before he sent his journeymen. I threw round me my scarf. He advanced; he opened the door; my back was toward it; I felt a little thrill – a curious sensation, too quick and transient to be analyzed. I turned, I stood in the supposed master artisan’s presence: looking toward the doorway, I saw it filled with a figure, and my

eyes printed upon my brain the picture of M. Paul.” (449)

When she hears footsteps outside, Lucy initially expects that they belong to returning workmen. Quickly, though, her sensitive hearing registers the fact that the steps belong to only one person, and that he is wearing shoes rather than workboots, and so she expects that the visitor is the master carpenter.²² Dependent upon Lucy’s bodily sensitivity, this passage also highlights the degree to which Lucy and Paul have a sympathetic connection to each other that excludes the field of the visual: *before* she turns and finds M. Paul, she feels a “thrill” of connection, or anticipation, or premonition. This thrill is “too quick and transient to be analyzed”: Lucy can only feel it, not reflect upon it cognitively.²³ There is nothing to be read in or deduced from that thrill; it can only be experienced somatically. Finally, even when Lucy and Paul meet, in this passage, visually, that vision is tactile: Lucy’s “eyes printed upon [her] brain” an image of Paul. Neither distant nor cognitive, this scene of recognition and experience depends upon proximity, bodily sensitivity, and immediacy.

The shift from vision to touch happens most significantly, and to greatest ethical effect, in the context of the relationship between Lucy and Paul. But the importance of touch and materiality is not limited to Lucy and Paul’s interaction. Perhaps surprisingly,

²² This reference to the “master carpenter” is one of many instances in which Paul Emanuel is implicitly compared to Christ. Other instances include references to the harrowing of hell (Paul’s travels to Basseterre) as well as, of course, his name. Several critics have noted this association, including Kathryn Bond Stockton, *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1994).

²³ “Thrill” also recalls the experiments of physiological psychologists, which sought to identify the effects of electrical impulses on muscles and nerves. See, for example, George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life* (2 vols.), Collection of British Authors vol. 518 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1860), and *Sea-side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles, & Jersey* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1858). This association with biological experiments solidifies the materiality implicit in this passage, emphasizing the degree to which the emotional relationship between Lucy and Paul is predicated on materiality rather than vision or imagination.

the figure of the nun is connected to the system of touch I identify in this novel as the foundation of an ethics of materiality. In fact, the nun embodies the epistemological progression of the novel: the nun begins as a spectral image that both depends on and paradoxically undermines the truth-value of sight; through material contact, the nun is discovered to be nothing more than a pile of rags, scraps that can be torn apart, which eliminates some of the eeriness of the image of the nun but does nothing to explain its presence; finally, the solution to the nun's identity and the reason for her presence are made known only through text, by means of a letter from Ginevra to Lucy. This transition from visual specter, to tangible material contact, to textual solution presents the trajectory of Lucy's narrative writ small.

The nun first appears as a spectral image that calls into question both Lucy's sanity and the reliability of vision: "I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white. Say what you will, reader . . . this I vow – I saw there – in that room – on that night – an image like – a NUN!" (231). By the second encounter, the nun has assumed a more substantial presence and looks back at Lucy:

[T]he moon, so dim hitherto, seemed to shine out somewhat brighter: a ray even gleamed white before me, and a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation. I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman. Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still. I spoke. 'Who are you? and why do you come to me?' She stood mute. She had no face – no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me. (279)

The nun is not yet fully embodied, but she is less spectral, less ephemeral, than she was in

the first encounter, and she is far more material: instead of a poorly defined “image,” a vague “figure” with a black skirt, white veil, and “bandaged” head, this appearance reveals a “tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman” whose face and features are “masked” and who moves away when Lucy tries to touch her. In the third encounter, the nun has substance and materiality:

Dark as it was, it seemed to me that something more solid than either night shadow, or branch shadow, blackened out of the boles. At last the struggle ceased. What birth succeeded this travail? What Dryad was born of these throes? We watched fixedly. A sudden bell rang in the house – the prayer bell. Instantly into our alley there came, out of the *berceau*, an apparition, all black and white. With a sort of angry rush – close, close past our faces – swept swiftly the very NUN herself! Never had I seen her so clearly. She looked tall of stature, and fierce off gesture. As she went, the wind rose sobbing; the rain poured wild and cold; the whole night seemed to feel her. (346)

The nun is birthed by the storm and the enormous tree under which Lucy and Paul stand and beneath whose roots Lucy has buried the letters from John Graham Bretton. She appears at the sound of the prayer bell, as if driven from the garden by its ringing; her most emphatic characteristic here is of motion – not static vision, but rushing, angry movement. She is again an “apparition,” but her presence is now invested with affect – an “angry rush” – and with bodily substance: she is “tall of stature, and fierce of gesture.” She is material enough in this encounter to be felt as she moves past their faces: material enough, in fact, to be felt by “the whole night.” Lucy’s vision of the nun is clearer here than previously, but her perception of the nun is also in multiple senses simultaneously, suggesting the increasing materiality of the nun.

Lucy’s final encounter with the nun reduces that specter to simple materiality, completely divested of either supernatural power or even life:

On mine – the twentieth couch – nothing *ought* to have lain: I had left it void, and void should also have found it. What, then, do I see between the half-drawn curtains? What dark, usurping shape, supine, long, and strange? Is it a robber who has made his way through the open streetdoor, and lies there in wait? It looks very black, I think it looks – not human. Can it be a wandering dog that has come in from the street and crept and nestled hither? Will it spring, will it leap out if I approach? Approach I must. Courage! One step! My head reeled, for by the faint night lamp, I saw stretched on my bed the old phantom – the NUN. (440)

Lucy proceeds to dismember the nun's remains, identified now as the "shreds and fragments" (440) of a nun's robe and habit. Simultaneously reduced and materialized – it is neither ghost nor human, neither specter nor intruder nor, even, "a wandering dog" looking for a warm place to sleep – the nun here shifts completely and permanently from the realm of the supernatural to the realm of the thoroughly banal, and is at the same time experienced not through vision but through touch. Yet the material remains, although they provide proof that the nun is not a specter, do nothing to explain the reasons for her existence or the identity of the person under the disguise. It is not until Lucy receives a letter from the recently eloped Ginevra that the mystery comes to a close: "Do you begin to comprehend by this time that M. le Comte de Hamal was the nun of the attic, and that he came to see your humble servant?" (444). The fright caused by the nun's sudden and unexplained appearance may dissipate as the figure shifts from ghostly specter to material figure to shreds of fabric, but it is only when the nun is textualized that Lucy can make any sense of what has happened.

Sacrificial Bodies, Sacramental Writing

As the episode with the nun suggests, it is only through images of writing that

Villette provides adequate answers to lingering questions. In presenting episodes of Lucy's writing the novel demonstrates both the origin of writing in intensely felt physiological sensation and its existence as an ideal form of embodiment of the writing self, a variety of embodiment that is simultaneously immediate and mediated, private and public. Lucy wrestles with allegorical figures in nearly every episode of writing; in doing so, she demonstrates both her own intense sensitivity to emotional influences and the degree to which she experiences all sensory and affective input physiologically. In the first instance of Lucy's writing, she presents her task as constrained by a personified Reason who seeks to prevent Lucy's written communication with John Graham Bretton and to mute her experience of affect. Even earlier, when she is contemplating the possibility of receiving and perhaps responding to a letter from John Graham Bretton, Lucy describes the cold, stern injunctions of Reason against any enjoyment she might derive from either Graham's letters themselves or from responding to them in writing: "Reason still whispered me [sic], laying on my shoulder a withered hand, and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld. 'If,' muttered she, 'if he *should* write, what then? Do you meditate pleasure in replying? Ah, fool! I warn you! Brief be your answer. Hope no delight of heart – no indulgence of intellect: grant no expansion to feeling – give holiday to no single faculty: dally with no friendly exchange: foster no genial intercommunion'" (215). Even in this injunction against affect – hope, delight, expansion, friendliness – the personified Reason appears to Lucy in terms of embodied senses and sensation, even of a bizarre kind of eroticism in which a whisper in Lucy's ear could as well be a death-like kiss. The subsequent contrast between the cruelty of Reason and the kindness of Imagination highlights the intensely sensual nature of Lucy's

emotional life: Reason treats Lucy with starvation, privation, coldness, and pain – “her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows” (216) – while Imagination brings “a ray sympathetic” (217) from heaven, along with the perfume and warmth of “eternal summer” (217); Imagination satisfies Lucy's hunger, assuages her weariness, and comforts her sorrows, while Reason's bed is cold and her table bare of sustenance. Not only are these psychic states embodied in allegorical personages; just as significant is that these personifications are associated with Lucy's experience of her own body, with physical manifestations and effects: Lucy experiences her emotions physically. This physical experience is presented not simply as analogous to bodily experience, and not as mere metaphor, but as literal bodily sensation.

When Lucy actually sits down to write her response to Graham's letter, she again contends with two allegorical personifications, a conflict that again highlights her bodily and emotional sensitivity. Lucy first writes a letter prompted by Feeling, and she describes the experience of writing itself in highly sensual language: “To begin with: Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt, then we sat down, spread our paper, dipped in the ink an eager pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart” (238-39). Continuing immediately to deny any “warmer feelings” than “a strongly adherent affection, a rooted and active gratitude” (239) toward John, Lucy nevertheless allies herself in this passage with the allegorical Feeling, and indeed demonstrates a certain warmth toward John. This sentence, which could have been phrased much more directly (“Feeling and I overcame Reason, and wrote sincerely of our emotions” might be one possible alternative), contains instead a prolonged

description of the apparently very sensual act of writing.²⁴ The letter prompted by Feeling is written “for [Lucy’s] own relief” (238), and the act itself brings Lucy pleasure: She and Feeling spread their paper, touching its surface; their pen is “eager” and seems to welcome its immersion in the pot of ink. Both an act of expression and communication and an episode of sensual experience, this literal putting of pen to paper brings Lucy “deep enjoyment.” The layers of eroticism in this letter multiply: it is an unacknowledged love letter to Graham (Lucy’s protestations to the contrary notwithstanding), written at the prompting and with the full participation of Feeling; in the process of writing this love letter to the man whose attention she would welcome, she engages in the eroticized act of writing itself with a sensitive, responsive female Feeling. Steeped in sexual innuendo, this description of the act of writing once again illustrates Lucy’s sensitivity to sensation. More importantly, it highlights the convergence of sensation with the act of writing as well as with the written product.

An allegorical personification accompanies Lucy’s other major writing task, the writing examination for which she must produce an essay on a theme of her examiners’ choosing. Her examiners – Messieurs Boissec and Rochemorte – assign “Human Justice” as the theme. Like her examiners themselves, whose names – dry wood and dead rock – indicate that they are personifications of abstractions as much as they are living human beings, Human Justice appears first as a “blank, cold abstraction” (377).

²⁴ In discussing Lucy’s treatment of her letter from Dr. John, Ivan Kreilkamp, “Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*” (*Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 32.3 [June 1999], 331-54), notes that “Lucy describes her letters not merely as secondary vehicles for the presence of speech, but as themselves the foundational source of real value. Lucy cathects the writing surface with voluptuous, sensual desire” (340). While Kreilkamp is discussing the letters Lucy receives, a topic I will discuss at length below, his analysis of the written page is important in the writing process as well, as, in my reading, it accurately describes Lucy’s treatment of her own process of putting pen to paper.

Lucy's contemplation of her examiners' hypocrisy – “If ‘Human Justice’ were what she ought to be, you two would scarce hold your present post, or enjoy your present credit”

(377) – leads to an idea, which she pursues:

An idea once seized, I fell to work. ‘Human Justice’ rushed before me in novel guise, a red, random beldame with arms akimbo. I saw her in her house, the den of confusion: servants called to her for orders or help which she did not give; beggars stood at her door waiting and starving unnoticed; a swarm of children, sick and quarrelsome, crawled round her feet and yelled in her ears appeals for notice, sympathy, cure, redress. The honest woman cared for none of these things. She had a warm seat of her own by the fire, she had her own solace in a short black pipe, and a bottle of Mrs. Sweeny’s soothing syrup; she smoked and she sipped and she enjoyed her paradise, and whenever a cry of the suffering souls about her pierced her ears too keenly – my jolly dame seized the poker or the hearth brush: if the offender was weak, wronged, and sickly, she effectually settled him; if he was strong, lively, and violent, she only menaced, then plunged her hand in her deep pouch, and flung a liberal shower of sugarplums. Such was the sketch of ‘Human Justice,’ scratched hurriedly on paper, and placed at the service of Messrs. Boissec and Rochemorte. (377-78)

Not a description of the pen, ink, and paper like her letter-writing to Graham was, this passage instead documents the process of composition along with its constituent elements of creativity, visualization, and the channeling of emotion. In doing so, it highlights the sharp sensitivity that enables Lucy’s writing as well as the form of embodiment that writing allows: the transformation of a “blank, cold abstraction” into a “jolly dame” with a “warm seat of her own by the fire,” “a short black pipe, and a bottle of Mrs. Sweeny’s soothing syrup.” Lucy’s composition in this case grows out of her mortification related to her ignorance in the examination and to her expression of emotion to her examiners: “Beholding the judges cast on M. Emanuel a hard look of triumph, and hearing the distressed tremor of my own voice, out I burst in a fit of choking tears. The emotion was far more of anger than grief; had I been a man and strong, I could have challenged that

pair on the spot – but it *was* emotion, and I would rather have been scourged, than betrayed it” (376). If expressing her anger in tears is humiliating and unacceptable, turning that anger into text is its ideal manifestation; in this case, the textual form it takes is of yet another body, of an abstraction-become-flesh.

As these episodes demonstrate, the process of creating text is both psychologically and somatically intense, and it involves Lucy’s entire body. It should come as no surprise, then, that the process of becoming text should be similarly intense. Lucy’s observation of the King of Labassecour at the concert initiates the connection that will become so important between writing, embodiment, and sympathetic connection through a version of reading based on tactility.

I had never read, never been told anything of [the King’s] nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stylet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand . . . Full mournful and significant was that spectacle! Not the less so because, both for the aristocracy and the honest bourgeoisie of Labassecour, its peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I could not discover that one soul present was either struck or touched. (201-202)

Lucy, seemingly alone in the audience, reads the King’s face. However, her reading here does not depend on the detached vision implied in the kind of physiognomical reading performed by M. Paul that first night at the pensionnat. Instead, what Lucy reads in the king’s face consists of textual marks engraved “as with iron stylet.” These are not purely visual images that rest on the surface of the king’s face, but are instead marks that can be perceived tactilely because they exist in three dimensions – they are *in* the king’s face, not *on* the king’s face.

The characters that are engraved into the king’s countenance suggest both the

written signs of language, the arbitrary signifiers of meaning that are created through contact between writing or carving implement and surface, and the essential identity of an individual. In this case (and, I will argue, in every important instance in this novel), that correspondence makes the written character and the individual character of the same substance: that is, the king's character consists of, grows from, and is embodied most eloquently in, the written characters, the written text on his face. Lucy "reads" the king, but not in a way that suggests the detachment of the novel's usual deployment of surveillance. Instead, she reads the king's character(s), the king's text, and thus, the king himself, and her reading suggests not only the potential tactility of vision (she feels the meaning of the character(s) rather than simply seeing them) but also the vital connection between character and text, between existence and embodiment, between identity and writing.

Lucy's description bears striking resemblance to the description of a method of writing taught to the blind at L'Institution Royales des Jeunes Aveugles, the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris. Valentin Häuy, the founder of the school, devised a method by which he could teach his blind students to write: "Paper was placed on a fairly soft surface, such as leather or sheets of newspaper, and, 'using a pen of iron, the top of which was not split, and with which writing without ink, and supported with a strong paper, they produce upon it a character in relief which they can afterwards read, in passing their fingers long the elevated lines on the back of the page.'"²⁵ This was neither

²⁵ M. Galliod, *Notice Historique sur l'Etablissement des Jeunes Aveugles* (1828), 10; quoted in Pamela Lorimer, "A Critical Evaluation of the Development of the Tactile Modes of Reading and an Analysis and Evaluation of Researches Carried Out in Endeavours to Make the Braille Code Easier to Read and Write" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1996), chapter 1. Archived at the International Braille Research Center at <www.braille.org>.

the first nor the last system of writing that produced tactile characters that could be read by touch. Earlier attempts included the carving of letters into wooden tablets and the creation of moveable letters cast in lead that could be pressed into the back of paper.²⁶ In 1784, a young blind musician, Mlle. Maria von Paradis, was announced in the *Journal de Paris*; the article both noted that she was to play in the capital, and described her system of copying her music “by means of pricks on paper rested on a soft surface.”²⁷ Two years later, in 1786, Häuy developed a tactile version of the alphabet and published the first embossed book; his method of printing was to press letters made from wire into heavy paper so that the raised outlines of the letters could be felt on the front of the paper. In 1809, Charles Barbier, an army officer, wrote a pamphlet including a description of a kind of cutout writing produced by knife rather than by pen or pencil; although he intended it for use in the army as a kind of shorthand code, the Academy of Sciences recommended its use for the blind; in 1823, he visited the Institute for the Blind in Paris and demonstrated his method to students, among whom was Louis Braille. Braille used Barbier’s system as a foundation for his own system of writing, a description of which was published in 1829.²⁸

²⁶ Lorimer describes these earlier attempts: “[D. R.] Guillie [*An Essay on the Instruction and Amusements of the Blind* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1819) . . . described how in the sixteenth century letters cut in wood were ‘sunk or made hollow, on which account the fingers were unable to trace the forms of the letters unless they were very large.’ . . . In 1575, Rampazetto of Rome taught people to read by letters carved in relief on thin wooden tablets.” She also notes that in 1617, Father Lana devised what seems to be the first version of punctiform writing, which was never put into practice but which may have been known to Charles Barbier (discussed below in the text) because of his interest in codes. All of this information about the history of reading and writing methods for the blind comes from chapters 1 and 2 of Lorimer’s study.

²⁷ Lorimer, “A Critical Evaluation,” chapter 1.

²⁸ While Braille’s method was used at the Institute for the Blind from 1832 on, it was not officially recognized for use in France until 1854, two years after Braille’s death, and it did not catch on in the rest of Europe or in the United States until decades later: Britain accepted braille in 1870, while a number of other

Additionally, the connection Lucy identifies between writing and identity recalls graphology's analysis of both identity and character as revealed through an individual's handwriting. Although the term "graphology" was not coined until 1868 by Jean-Hippolyte Michon, correspondences between a person's handwriting and identity were made for centuries before that. In 1609, Francois Demelle wrote a book on identifying forgeries, suggesting that identity could be confirmed by a signature. Later in the century, Camillo Baldi wrote about the correspondence between handwriting and personal characteristics. Lavater also wrote about handwriting in his essays on physiognomy, observing that "with the same ink, with the same pen, and on the same paper" the same person might produce different writing at different times, suggesting that mood and psychological state could affect handwriting.²⁹ Lavater goes on to ask, "Isn't it true . . . that the exterior form of a letter often leads us to make judgments about whether it was written in a calm or anxious state, in a hurry, or in a relaxed frame of mind?"³⁰

The connections that graphology and its immediate precursors made between individual, bodily identity and handwriting were quite different from the ideal of enlightenment writing practices, the goal of which seems to have been the complete disembodiment of writing. For example, Diderot's *Encyclopedie* identifies the first essential steps of

countries did not adopt it until after an international congress on the education of the blind was held in Paris in 1878. It seems unlikely, then, that Charlotte Brontë would have been familiar with braille as a means of tactile reading. It is very possible, however, that she would have known about the earlier methods of tactile reading and writing, particularly given the correspondence of her image of the King's face to the description of writing by the blind.

²⁹ Johann Caspar Lavater, *L'art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie* (quoted in Roxanne Panchasi, "Graphology and the Science of Individual Identity in Modern France" (*Configurations* 4.1 [1996], 1-31), 3.)

³⁰ Lavater, *L'art*, in Panchasi, 4.

writing as “trimming the quill, positioning the body, and mastering movement. The point of such mastery was to produce a handwriting so legible that it left no trace of the body.”³¹

Numerous instances build upon the associations between the act of writing, intense sensation, and ideal embodiment. In particular, faces become text through the engraving of characters into their surface, thereby furthering the association between sensation (especially pain), writing, and embodiment. The face of the King of Labassecour is marked with readable text, with engraved marks that suggest more than that the King suffers from melancholy. While they are the visible (and, as I note above, potentially tactile) signs of a particular condition, they are also the literal effects of the presence of suffering: that is, suffering – or, perhaps, Hypochondria – conceived as a personified abstraction, is the inscribing agent that makes marks on the king’s face. The marks are not simply an effect of sickness, a consequence that remains after sickness leaves; rather, the ailment is endowed with agency in this conception, empowered to make literal, physical contact with the king’s body and to leave marks in three dimensions on his face.

Not all faces are as easily marked, however, and this difference suggests different degrees of investment in the materiality of embodiment. For example, although Lucy is deeply moved by the performance of Vashti, Graham remains sedate and unruffled, demonstrating that he belongs to the world of action rather than of thought or of enthusiasm. This passage does more, though, than simply distinguish Graham from

³¹ Emily Jane Cohen, “Enlightenment and the Dirty Philosopher” (*Configurations* 5.3 [1997], 369-424), 386.

Vashti. Graham's natural emotional and physical equilibrium suggests that he moves through the world untouched by enthusiasm³² or, presumably, other overwhelming psychological experience. Graham lacks the strong affect so closely connected to the process of writing for Lucy; this passage highlights, therefore, not only Graham's resilience to deep feeling but also the novel's insistence upon the connections between that deeply experienced feeling, writing, and embodiment through the image of impressibility:

His [John's] natural attitude was not the meditative, nor his natural mood the sentimental; *impressionable* he was as dimpling water, but, almost as water, *unimpressible*: the breeze, the sun, moved him – metal could not grave, nor fire brand. Dr. John *could* think, and think well, but he was rather a man of action than of thought; he *could* feel, and feel vividly in his way, but his heart had no chord for enthusiasm: to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, embuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. (244, italics in original)

Lucy says that Graham is as "*impressionable*" "as dimpling water" – his surface ripples, perhaps, with passing contact. However, also like water, Graham cannot be marked permanently by anything – he is "*unimpressible*": "metal could not grave, nor fire brand." Any impressions made on Graham will quickly slip away, leaving him unscathed without

³² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "enthusiasm" as "Possession by a god, supernatural inspiration, prophetic or poetic frenzy"; "Poetical fervour, impassioned mood or tone"; "Fancied inspiration"; and "Rapturous intensity of feeling in favour of a person, principle, cause, etc.; passionate eagerness in any pursuit, proceeding from an intense conviction of the worthiness of the object." "Enthusiasm." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Def. 1a, 1b, 2, and 3a. Interestingly, a reference from 1620 connects enthusiasm to the Bacchanal; Vashti also has implied connections to the Bacchanal, described as she is as a maenad, one of the women who, when under the influence of Bacchus during his festival, would literally tear apart any man unlucky enough to come into contact with them. Most of the definitions of enthusiasm are negative, suggestive of either dangerous possession or excessive and misdirected religious feeling. Yet Lucy's use suggests that she views it differently, in spite of the connotations it clearly carries within this novel of just the sort of excess articulated in the *OED*'s definitions. Instead, Lucy's use suggests that such overwhelming affect, although it may be dangerous, is not necessarily something to be avoided. See note 34 below regarding Lucy and the sublime, another instance of overwhelming affect.

permanent mark. In contrast, Lucy contends that he cannot be impressed, or, perhaps, that nothing can be impressed *onto* or *into* him. Although Ginevra thinks Dr. John “a serious, impassioned man, too grave and too impressible” (244), Lucy recognizes the reality of his identity, which is one of stable, nearly disembodied rationality. Unlike the King of Labassecour, whose character(s) and body are synonymous, and unlike Lucy herself, Graham’s material self cannot be marked by his experiences; his face and body are likely to remain the bland, attractive, thoroughly English (if tinted by some past connection to the Irish, as evidenced by the reddish hair) versions they are from the beginning to the end of the novel. If the king’s face has been “graven as with iron stylet,” Graham cannot be marked by iron or fire. Always calm and even, Graham will consistently gravitate toward the moderate: “to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome.” Graham “ha[s] no sympathy” for the extreme, “for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming,” unlike Lucy, who seems to bear an extraordinary affinity toward, and respond strongly to, just such wild, intense, dangerous storms. Graham cannot be written on; it makes sense, consequently, that Lucy’s narrative dismisses him and his romance with Polly well before the end of her own story. Polly and John are a match in this way: both are nearly without body. Graham is purely rational and Polly is generally emotional, although her experience of emotion, at least as an adult, is far less affective than is Lucy’s, and it does not leave the bodily traces that Lucy’s experience of emotion – or anything else – does.

Like the king, whose face is marked by his suffering with engraved characters, Lucy is also marked by suffering. Her face bears engraved marks, which Paul can read:

“‘Well,’ said he, after some seconds’ scrutiny, ‘there is no denying that signature: Constancy wrote it; her pen is of iron. Was the record painful?’ ‘Severely painful,’ I said, with truth. ‘Withdraw her hand, monsieur; I can bear its inscribing force no more’” (452). As with previous scenes of writing, this involves a personified abstraction, Constancy; also as previously, the act of writing simultaneously emerges from intense affective and physiological sensation and ends in a version of embodiment that both reveals and camouflages. Lucy is not the writer here, but the text; nevertheless, the process of writing, of the inscription on her face, both emerges from her pain at Paul Emanuel’s departure and results in the continued pain of loneliness.

Writing a letter to Graham involved Lucy’s entire body, both directly and through the physiological experience of affective sensations; it should come as no surprise, then, that *becoming* text should be as intensely sensory an experience as *producing* text. While Lucy is the only character who speaks directly of the process by which she became text, by which she was written on, she is not the only character to become textualized in some way. Instead, both Graham and Paul are transformed at different points – Graham temporarily and unsuccessfully, and Paul permanently and perfectly – into text through the letters they send to Lucy. From the moment Lucy sees the letter in Rosine’s hand – “the letter whose face of enamelled white and single Cyclops-eye of vermilion-red had printed themselves so clear and perfect on the retina³³ of an inward vision” (225) – she

³³ Again, references to vision multiply: the letter is sealed with wax that looks like a “single Cyclops-eye,” while the starkness of the white and red leave marks – print – on Lucy’s eyeball. Vision in this reference is both dispersed – nonvisual objects are invested with elements of the visual – and complicated – actual vision is accomplished through the immediacy of physical contact (the colors that “printed themselves so clear and perfectly on the retina of an inward vision”) rather than the distance usually required by sight. Sight in this passage becomes both tactile and reciprocal in that the seen object marks the viewer. The reference to the imprinting of an image on the retina both reflects contemporary theories about vision and anticipates a similar reference in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872), in which Dorothea finds her retinas

hopes that it is the promised letter from Graham, which it is:

For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live . . . it was neither sweet hail, nor small coriander seed – neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild savory mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. It was what the old dying patriarch demanded of his son Esau, promising him in requital the blessing of his last breath. It was a godsend; and I inwardly thanked the God who had vouchsafed it. (225)

This letter is material, “not a dream, not an image of the brain,” not a hallucination. Lucy characterizes Graham’s letter not only as sustenance but, far more materially, as “the wild savory mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining.” Text has literally become flesh. Further, this version of text is not neat, not tidy – it is a “wild” “mess,” presumably bloodied from the kill, very recently alive, still bearing traces of the life it so recently had and which it can still impart to the one who consumes it. Interestingly, some of the language used here to describe what this letter of John’s is *not* – “sweet,” “slight,” “luscious honey” – predicts Lucy’s implicit criticism of his moderation at Vashti’s performance: “bright,” “soft,” “sweet,” “beautiful.” This might suggest that Lucy’s impression here of John’s worth changes as she knows him better; however, considering that her criticism comes barely twenty pages later, I would argue instead that it is John’s *letter*, the written text itself, that is nourishing, not his person, which remains, as Lucy notes, un(re)markable.

That value inheres in the written text rather than in its connection to the supposed original, Dr. John himself, is borne out by Lucy’s reaction when she misplaces the letter

similarly marked by the red draperies of Rome at Christmas, an image and concept I discuss at more length in Chapter 3.

in the attic. Upon first realizing she has left the letter in the attic after running downstairs, frightened by the first sighting of the nun, Lucy runs back to the attic, feeling that “Flesh or spirit must be defied for its sake” (231). Yet even when she realizes that Graham is there in person, she insists upon the importance of the letter (which she has read once): ““Was it my letter, Lucy?” ‘Your own: yours – the letter you wrote to me. I had come here to read it quietly. I could not find another spot where it was possible to have it to myself. I had saved it all day – never opened it till this evening. It was scarcely glanced over: I *cannot bear* to lose it. Oh, my letter!’” (232). When confronted with the real person, Lucy prefers the written text: “He asked me, smiling, why I cared for his letter so very much. I thought, but did not say, that I prized it like the blood in my veins. I only answered that I had so few letters to care for” (232). The connections between text and embodiment multiply here: Graham’s body is replaced by text; the text becomes “nourishing and salubrious meat,” and is as valuable to Lucy as her own blood is. Lucy prizes Graham’s letter³⁴ as she prizes her own blood, connecting in that comparison three bodies, one textual and two human, and emphasizing the connections between embodiment and writing. If text becomes flesh for Lucy, John Graham’s flesh becomes – and is replaced by – text in his letter.

³⁴ Polly similarly invests Graham’s letters to her with enormous value, although the value is far more controlled and more moderate than Lucy’s language suggests. If to Lucy, the letter is a “wild savory mess” of freshly killed meat, to Polly it is “full, solid, steady,” “clear, firm, and rounded – no slovenly splash of wax,” “a clean, mellow, pleasant manuscript that soothes you as you read.” If Lucy’s letter is wild and invigorating, Polly’s is balanced and soothing (351-52). The difference between Lucy’s and Polly’s perception of the respective letters suggests the distinction Burke makes between the beautiful and the sublime: the beautiful is even, balanced, smooth, with curved lines and predictable surfaces, while the sublime is unpredictable, overwhelming, terrifying, and rough. Lucy is consistently associated with the sublime, as is Paul Emanuel, while Polly and John are associated with the pleasant. As becomes clearer through this reading of the ethics of materiality, the sublime insists upon materiality even as it transcends it. The description also recalls Lavater’s description of the correspondences between handwriting and mood (see note 31 above).

If Graham is temporarily turned into text through this letter, Paul Emanuel becomes permanently, and perfectly, textualized upon his departure to Basseterre. A hint of this arrives to Lucy shortly before Paul is scheduled to depart on his ship. Although he has made a visit to the pensionnat to take leave of the students and teachers, Lucy has been unable to have a moment with him and fears now that he has left the school and that she has missed her last chance. As she despairs, a child brings her a note from Paul, which states his intention of finding her before he leaves and his promise not to leave without seeing her one last time: “What I *should* have done, I know not, when a little child – the least child in the school – broke with its simplicity and its unconsciousness into the raging yet silent center of that inward conflict. ‘Mademoiselle,’ lisped the treble voice, ‘I am to give you that. Monsieur Paul said I was to seek you all over the house, from the *grenier* to the cellar, and when I found you, to give you that.’ And the child delivered a note; the little dove dropped on my knee its olive leaf plucked off” (417). Paul’s brief note provides Lucy the same sense of rescue that the olive leaf must have provided to Noah and his family, the promise of dry land within a bird’s flying range of the ark, the promise of escape from seemingly endless confinement. Further, not only does this dry land stand as a metaphor of escape, in this case it also stands as a distinctly solid and material refuge from the instability of the waters threatening to swamp Lucy. The actual letters Paul sends to Lucy after his departure bear out this comparison:

Do not think that this genial flame sustained itself, or lived wholly on a bequeathed hope or a parting promise. A generous provider supplied bounteous fuel. I was spared all chill, all stint; I was not suffered to fear penury; I was not tried with suspense. By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude. He wrote because he liked to write; he did not abridge, because he cared not to abridge. He sat down, he took pen and paper, because he loved Lucy and had much to

say to her; because he was faithful and thoughtful, because he was tender and true. There was no sham and no cheat, and no hollow unreal in him. Apology never dropped her slippery oil on his lips – never proffered, by his pen, her coward feints and paltry nullities: he would give neither a stone, nor an excuse – neither a scorpion, nor a disappointment; his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed. (462)

In contrast to Reason's "stint" and "chill," "her barren board" (216), Paul spares Lucy all such suffering and want, and he does so apparently through letters since his financial contribution consisted of setting up Lucy's school for the first year before leaving, after which time Lucy would be responsible for finances. Instead, it is Paul's letters here that "spare[]" Lucy "all chill, all stint." The infusion of Paul's love in these letters to Lucy echoes (if in a milder way) Lucy's pleasure in writing to Graham; like Lucy, Paul sits down with pen and paper because he loves someone.

Although it is made necessarily permanent with his death, Paul's association with writing occurs only when he leaves Vilette; throughout the novel, Paul is characterized as a fine speaker but not as a writer, as one whose voice carries both his ideas and his feelings but who avoids the labor of writing. In particular, Paul is a storyteller: he both edits the material he reads to Madame Beck's students to make it appropriate for his audience of girls and women, and he creates his own stories to entertain them. In both cases, Lucy stands in awe of Paul's "impromptu faculty" and his ability to connect so thoroughly to his audience through speech:

It was his occasional custom – and a very laudable, acceptable custom, too – to arrive of an evening, always *a l'improviste*, unannounced, burst in on the silent hour of study, establish a sudden despotism over us and our occupations . . . and, drawing forth a single thick volume, or a handful of pamphlets, substitute for the besotted 'lecture pieuse,' drawled by a sleepy pupil, some tragedy made grand by grand reading, ardent by fiery action – some drama, whereof, for my part, I rarely studied the intrinsic merit; for M. Emanuel made it a vessel for an outpouring, and filled it with his native verve and passion like a

cup with a vital brewage. . . . I noticed more than once that where retrenchment without substitute would have left unmeaning vacancy, or introduced weakness, he could, and did, improvise whole paragraphs, no less vigorous than irreproachable: the dialogue – the description – he engrafted was often far better than that he pruned away. (309)

Officially a reading intended to replace “the besotted ‘lecture pieuse,’” Paul’s performance is more storytelling than reading. According to Lucy, he manages to take the story – “some drama” that does not particularly interest Lucy – and make “it a vessel for an outpouring,” to “fill[] it with his native verve and passion like a cup with a vital brewage.” Paul’s improvisations, made when his cuts would have damaged the narrative, were “often far better than that he pruned away.” Paul’s reading is creative rather than interpretive, and it generates new text rather than foreclosing it. Such is also true of Paul’s other episode of storytelling, done during the picnic in honor of his birthday:

He began to tell us a story. Well could he narrate There were beautiful touches in that little tale; sweet glimpses of feeling and hues of description that, while I listened, sunk into my mind, and since have never faded. . . . M. Emanuel was not a man to write books; but I have heard him lavish, with careless, unconscious prodigality, such mental wealth as books can seldom boast; his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss. Intellectually imperfect as I was, I could read little; there were few bound and printed volumes that did not weary me – whose perusal did not fag and blind – but his tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit’s eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong. I used to think what a delight it would be for one who loved him better than he loved himself to gather and store up those handfuls of gold dust, so recklessly flung to heaven’s reckless winds. (357-58)

Although “M. Emanuel was not a man to write books,” nevertheless Lucy understands him as text even before he produces his first note to her: “his mind was indeed my library.” Figured here explicitly as a *storyteller*, Paul Emanuel is nevertheless already textualized, already becoming written text. Paul even offers Lucy the opportunity to help him become text, asking her to become his amanuensis: “I could dictate it, though, with

pleasure to an amanuensis who suited me. Would Mademoiselle Lucy write for me if I asked her?" (358).

In clear opposition, Lucy is consistently associated with writing rather than with speech, and she insists upon the irreconcilability between the two modes. On one hand, Lucy derives relief and comfort from speech. On the other, however, she claims to be unable to express even simple thoughts while speaking. She "cannot put the case into words" (173) when Dr. John asks why she went to the confessional. She refuses to speak when Dr. John chastises her for watching him too closely: "I might have cleared myself on the spot, but would not. I did not speak. I was not in the habit of speaking to him. Suffering him, then, to think what he chose, and accuse me of what he would, I resumed some work I had dropped, and kept my head bent over it during the remainder of his stay" (91). Lucy's refusal to speak is certainly connected to her general revulsion toward self-revelation, but it is also important that she characterizes her refusal explicitly in terms of withheld speech; Lucy's ability to hold her speech in, even in those circumstances when she might wish to communicate, suggests her problematic relationship with speech itself as much as with self-revelation more broadly. She characterizes herself as either unable or unwilling to speak in answer to the questions posed by Messrs. Boissec and Rochemorte: "Though answers to the questions surged up fast, my mind filling like a rising well, ideas were there, but not words. I either *could* not, or *would* not speak – I am not sure which: partly, I think, my nerves had got wrong, and partly my humor was crossed" (376).

If spoken language is inadequate or intractable as a means for the communication of information, it is equally unsatisfactory as a method of expressing or communicating

feeling. Even when she might be able to use spontaneous speech to express intensely felt emotion, Lucy refuses such indulgence: “I clasped my hands very hard, and I drew my breath very deep; I held in the cry, I devoured the ejaculation, I forbade the start, I spoke and I stirred no more than a stone; but I knew what I looked on; through the dimness left in my eyes by many nights’ weeping, I knew him” (435-36). When Paul takes Lucy to her new school, spoken language again fails, and is consequently shown to be both inadequate and unnecessary: “I can no more remember the thoughts or the words of the ten minutes succeeding this disclosure than I can retrace the experience of my earliest year of life: and yet the first thing distinct to me is the consciousness that I was speaking very fast, repeating over and over again: “‘Did you do this, M. Paul? Is this your house? Did you furnish it? . . . Do you mean me? Am I the directress? Is there another Lucy Snowe? Tell me: say something.’ But he would not speak. His pleased silence, his laughing down-look, his attitude, are visible to me now” (455). When Lucy finally understands that the school is hers, that M. Paul has done this work for her, speech is displaced altogether:

I hardly knew what to do. I first caressed the soft velvet on his cuff, and then I stroked the hand it surrounded. It was his foresight, his goodness, his silent, strong, effective goodness, that overpowered me by their proved reality. It was the assurance of his sleepless interest which broke on me like a light from heaven; it was his (I will dare to say it) his fond, tender look, which now shook me indescribably. (455)

Paul Emanuel’s “sleepless interest” displaces the earlier “sleepless eye” of surveillance, even as material contact displaces both the distant, detached vision of surveillance and the requirement of speech: “In such inadequate language my feelings struggled for expression: they could not get it; speech, brittle and unmalleable, and cold as ice;

dissolved or shivered in the effort. He watched me still: he gently raised his hand to stroke my hair; it touched my lips in passing; I pressed it close, I paid it tribute. He was my king; royal for me had been that hand's bounty; to offer homage was both a joy and a duty" (456). Lucy's "caress" of the velvet cuff is returned by Paul's hand on her face and lips, providing through silent material contact both evidence and an example of sympathetic connection and the reciprocity of feeling.³⁵

Speaking is contrasted with writing at nearly every point in Lucy's life, and Lucy is consistently aligned with writing. The allegorical Reason, who tears up the first letter Lucy writes in response to Graham's letter, encourages her to talk to Graham rather than write because of the evident poverty in her speech:

'But I have talked to Graham and you did not chide,' I pleaded. 'No,' said she, 'I needed not. Talk for you is good discipline. You converse imperfectly. While you speak, there can be no oblivion of inferiority – no encouragement of delusion: pain, privation, penury stamp your language . . . ' 'But,' I again broke in, 'where the bodily presence is weak and the speech contemptible, sure there cannot be error in making written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve?' Reason only answered, 'At your peril you cherish that idea, or suffer its influence to animate any writing of yours!' 'But if I feel, may I *never* express?' '*Never!*' declared Reason. I groaned under her bitter sternness. (215-216)

³⁵ While Lucy does speak fluently once, when Paul asks her to take Justine Marie as one of her students, that fluency is made possible only by the material presence of Paul Emanuel, by both his physical proximity and direct contact: "He drew his chair nearer. . . . His chair touched mine; his hand, quietly advanced, turned me towards him. . . . Near me as he now sat, strongly and closely as he had long twined his life in mine – far as had progressed, and near as was achieved our minds' and affections' assimilation – the very suggestion of interference, of heart-separation, could be heard only with a fermenting excitement, an impetuous throe, a disdainful resolve, an ire, a resistance of which no human eye or cheek could hide the flame, nor any truth-accustomed tongue curb the cry. 'I want to tell you something,' I said; 'I want to tell you all.' . . . I spoke. All leaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue . . . All I had encountered I detailed, all I had recognized, heard, and seen; how I had beheld and watched himself; how I listened, how much heard, what conjectured; the whole history, in brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither truthful, literal, ardent, bitter" (457-58). Lucy's outpouring of feeling takes place not only as a result of Paul's encouragement but as a response to his physical presence, and I suggest that it reveals far more about the generative and ethical power of tactility than it does about Lucy's comfort with speech.

Reason knows Lucy's spoken language to be imperfect, inferior, marked with the "stamp" of "pain, privation, penury."³⁶ Reason is not the only personage in *Villette*, however, to encourage Lucy to speak, and this is not the only episode in which speaking and writing are presented as mutually exclusive activities (that is, in which speaking would prevent writing).

The most significant passage in which speech is opposed to writing is also the passage in which the comforts offered by spoken communication are most alluring. When Lucy goes to confession, she finds that "the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated – the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused – had done me good. I was already solaced" (150). Later, she tells Dr. John that she went to the church because "a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind: a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me – like . . . the current which passes through the heart, and which, if aneurism or any other morbid cause obstructs its natural channels, impetuously seeks abnormal outlet. I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these in closet, or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional" (173). Lucy describes the solace she gets from confession as analogous to the relief felt when physical pressure is released, when a "current" that is blocked from its usual path is released to flow naturally. Here Lucy

³⁶ In passages like this one, *Villette* presents writing as more accurately reflective of an individual's thoughts, even identity, than speech. In spite of the usual understanding of speech as both more embodied (because spoken by a present, and living, body) and more immediate (again, because of the presence of a speaking body) than writing, in this novel writing supercedes speech both in immediacy and in value. For Lucy, speech offers comfort but not fulfillment, and it is only through the material text that Paul (and, to a lesser extent, Dr. John) is ideally present to Lucy.

describes a physical system³⁷ that requires particular remedies, but suggests that in this case, the remedy – seeking solace through confession – was an “abnormal outlet.” The suggestion here is that it is the Catholic aspect of confession that is abnormal; after all, this conversation with Dr. John begins when he asks if she is now a Catholic. Yet Lucy’s reaction almost immediately after she leaves the confessional insists that what is “abnormal” about the episode is its insistence on speech:

Did I, do you suppose, reader, contemplate venturing again within that worthy priest’s reach? As soon should I have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace. That priest had arms which could influence me; he was naturally kind, with a sentimental French kindness, to whose softness I knew myself not wholly impervious. Without respecting some sorts of affection, there was hardly any sort, having a fiber of root in reality, which I could rely on my force wholly to withstand. Had I gone to him, he would have shown me all that was tender, and comforting, and gentle, in the honest popish superstition. Then he would have tried to kindle, blow and stir up in me the zeal of good works. I know not how it would all have ended. We all think ourselves strong in some points; we all know ourselves weak in many; the probabilities are that had I visited Numero 3, Rue des Mages, at the hour and day appointed, I might just now, instead of writing this heretic narrative, be counting my beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent on the Boulevard of Crecy in Villette. (151)

The danger Lucy associates with “that worthy priest” seems initially simply a matter of her dislike of Catholicism: the priest is as dangerous as “a Babylonish furnace.” Yet the real danger to Lucy here is from kindness and affection. In spite of her usual self-presentation as cold and unfeeling, this visit to the confessional reveals to Lucy her own emotional susceptibility to kindness from others. Lucy does not go back to visit Père Silas because, if she had, her “heretic narrative” – her autobiography – would have been

³⁷ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, notes that nineteenth-century medicine held that women’s bodily economy was maintained in a state of health only when nothing was obstructed; in particular, she discusses the belief that obstructions to menstruation could lead to permanent infertility, insanity, and other mental and physical maladies. Shuttleworth notes that this belief about female bodily economy is opposite that of male bodily economy, which necessitated strict control and the prevention of waste.

replaced by speech: “counting [her] beads” in prayer, going to confession. The solace of direct human speech would have eliminated the possibility of writing. If the kindness of others is nearly enough to make Lucy retreat from the public world, this suggests, it is speech itself that fosters such an all-consuming, self-effacing relationship. That she goes on to write her “heretic” autobiography, her novel, indicates Lucy’s preference for the different kind of materiality and embodiment enacted through writing; she prefers the materiality of the written text as the medium – the incarnation, perhaps – of the writer’s subjectivity and presence. Lucy’s desire to “mak[e] written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve” (216) is finally enacted in the form of the novel.

Protestant Lucy is in fact happiest when Paul Emanuel is away in Basseterre because he is with her in the ideal form: his letters, imbued with himself in a way that not only allows but encourages the intimate contact of touch without bodies. While Kreilkamp has claimed that *Villette* uses text to displace and erase speaking and perceiving bodies from the world of the novel,³⁸ I argue that, far from being pure, disembodied spirit immanent in the written text of these letters, the letters themselves are the full embodiments of the desired person. That is, human bodies are not replaced by disembodied texts; rather, they become ideally embodied through their transformation into text. The textual body that remains of Paul requires of Lucy the same kind of introspective faith that Protestant Christianity requires of its adherents. Paul Emanuel’s

³⁸ Ivan Kreilkamp, “Unuttered,” 346.

name underscores his connection to the embodiment of text. As Paul,³⁹ he is the namesake of the most prolific author of the New Testament: the letters from Paul to the new churches at Galicia, Rome, Corinth, and elsewhere form the basis, particularly for Protestants, of the most important doctrines of Christianity.⁴⁰ Paul (the apostle) was an active letter writer and a proponent of the doctrine of grace; Paul (the literature professor), already a dispenser of grace, becomes a writer of letters as well. As Emanuel, M. Paul is named for the embodiment of God, suggesting that physical materiality, literal embodiment, must be in this novel an important characteristic for full humanity. The combination of these names suggests that ideal embodiment in a Protestant world comes in the form of written text.⁴¹

To make this unambiguous: *Villette* makes writing sacramental. Consider Graham's letter to Lucy. Not only does Lucy invest it with more importance than she does Graham himself; in addition, the letter enacts so many connections between various bodies and the written text that it results in a confusion of relationships and identifications and invests embodiment itself with hypersignificance. Graham is identified with the letter, which simultaneously erases and replaces his body as a material object; the letter in turn comes to signify meat that transmits sustenance when eaten; in

³⁹ When he is blinded on the road to Damascus, Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle, suggesting an analogous turning away from vision by Paul Emanuel.

⁴⁰ This is in distinction to Catholics, who traditionally view Peter and his writings as the foundation of Christian doctrine, a view that stems from a traditional interpretation of Jesus's naming Peter the first Pope.

⁴¹ Stockton, *God Between Their Lips*, argues that Paul Emanuel's identification with Christ makes the ideal beloved one who is absent; while I find Stockton's argument very helpful in understanding the role of loss and desire in *Villette*, I read Paul's letters as too important to constitute total loss. Instead, I argue that the letters are an ideal form of embodied presence, not simply the remains of a lost lover. For Stockton's discussion of Paul Emanuel-as-Christ-as-absent lover, see in particular chapter 4.

this process of transference, Graham's body is divested of its individuality and turned into "life-sustaining" food, which Lucy ingests but which she can never exhaust (her despair at losing the letter is not because she has not read it, but because she had read it only once and had hoped to read it repeatedly); the letter is as valuable to her as her own blood (synecdochically her body, her life, her identity). In this series of exchanges, bodies become written language, which in turn becomes a different kind of body, which can then be ingested to sustain life. In the Protestant system Brontë establishes in *Villette*, writing – particularly the written product – takes the place of the Catholic sacraments of confession and communion.⁴² In Catholicism, the bread and wine of communion become the body and blood of Christ through the doctrine of transubstantiation. That is, the bread and wine are not simply invested with a likeness of Christ, nor are they analogous to the body and blood; instead, they become the "whole substance" of Christ.⁴³ The exchanges and substitutions associated with Graham's letter to Lucy parallel the transformation in the sacrament of communion. If the bread and

⁴² Protestants also view communion as a sacrament, one of only two (as opposed to the seven in Catholicism), but view it differently than do Catholics. According to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith, the Church of England's original statement of faith, "The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean [sic] whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith . . ." ("Article XXVIII: Of the Lord's Supper." Retrieved 17 February 2006 from The Victorian Web <<http://www.victorianweb.org>>).

⁴³ According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, transubstantiation is "the conversion in the Eucharist of the whole substance of the bread into the body and of the wine into the blood of Christ, only the appearances (and other 'accidents') of bread and wine remaining" (Catholic Encyclopedia, "Transubstantiation." Retrieved from <<http://newadvent.org/cathen.htm>>).

wine of communion are the Real Presence⁴⁴ of Christ, the written text of Graham's letter is an analogous kind of presence; further, *Villette*'s conception of writing insists on embodiment in terms that strongly parallel the actual, literal embodiment of Christ in the elements of communion.

Conclusion: Embodied Writers and Sympathetic Readers

I began this chapter by arguing that *Villette* should be read as a novel about writing, not as a novel about reading, noting that, given all of the episodes of reading the novel presents, there is a remarkable and ironic absence of examples presenting reading as an effective hermeneutic practice. In an additional layer of irony, this novel that presents an almost endless parade of partial or inaccurate readings seems to encourage, even demand to be read and interpreted itself. As an object of critical attention, *Villette* has provoked seemingly endless readings, all of which attempt to find the key to make sense of the novel, and most (again, ironically) attempt to find this key through a focus on vision, reading, and interpretation. To state this more directly, *Villette* is a novel that presents reading practices that do not work, one that suggests, I argue, that all such interpretive projects ultimately fail to identify anything of importance or value; it is simultaneously a novel that begs to be made the object of such interpretive attention. It presents episode after episode in which the hermeneutics of reading (and vision) fail, and then teases and cajoles its readers into offering all-incorporating interpretations of their

⁴⁴ The "Real Presence" of Christ consists of the body, blood, soul, and divinity, inseparably united in each particle of the bread and the wine: "In order to forestall at the very outset, the unworthy notion, that in the Eucharist we receive merely the Body and merely the Blood of Christ but not Christ in His entirety, the Council of Trent defined the Real Presence to be such as to include with Christ's Body and His Soul and Divinity as well" (Catholic Encyclopedia, "Real Presence." Retrieved from <<http://newadvent.org/cathen/05573a.htm>>).

own.

Heather Glen notes that vision in *Villette* tends to categorize and evaluate, but fails to provide actual connections between the seeing subject and the seen object: “The gaze that objectifies rather than recognizes – judging, evaluating, categorizing – is prominent in Lucy’s narrative.”⁴⁵ She goes on to point out that such vision is rarely particularly successful: the novel, she claims, is full of “images of partially occluded, bewildered vision, of the viewer as powerless in the face of an impinging phenomenal world. The perspective of *Villette*’s narrator is not one of authoritative distance, but located within the world which she seeks to describe.”⁴⁶ When one takes these two observations together, the resulting vision fails both in motive (that is, it seeks to separate rather than to sympathize, to take apart rather than to connect) and in technique (it is “partially occluded” and “bewildered” rather than clear and effective).

To consider writing sacramental is both to require and to enact a new kind of reading. The bread of communion cannot be divided into bread and body, and the presence of Christ cannot be divided into the constituent parts of body, blood, soul, and divinity; instead, in the Catholic sacrament the communicant ingests the entirety of the presence simultaneously. I suggest that *Villette* calls for a similar method of reading, a method that aims not to analyze, dissect, evaluate, and interpret in order to locate the definitive meaning but rather to experience and recognize. This reading-by-faith shifts the focus from the distance of vision to the proximity of touch, from the detachment of intellect to the immediacy of affect. In this method of reading, the boundaries between

⁴⁵ Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë*, 258.

⁴⁶ Heather Glen, *Charlotte Brontë*, 259.

texts and bodies – writing bodies, represented bodies, reading bodies – are blurred, and identifications proliferate.

Lucy Snowe presents herself as cold and unfeeling, utterly unsympathetic to those around her, yet her private life is intensely, perhaps overly passionate, as well as keenly felt physiologically; she experiences her own interiority in terms of her body, and she explains those sensations materially. Lucy creates herself as a text, which Paul reads through his body as much as through his eyes. In this production of writing-as-embodiment and reading-as-touch, *Villette* both instantiates a form of the exteriorization and materialization of interior experience and teaches a way to read texts/bodies through the immediacy of touch rather than the detachment of vision.

Chapter 3

Reading Minds, Reading Bodies in George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil"

In Chapter 2, I argued that *Villette* insists upon the materiality of writing, both the textual product and the action, and that the novel ultimately presents written text as the ideal form of embodied presence. Like *Villette*, George Eliot's 1859 novella "The Lifted Veil" connects narrative to sensation and embodiment, but it does so through attention to reading rather than to writing.¹ Reading, in "The Lifted Veil," is tied thoroughly and inescapably to materiality and to embodiment. All acts of reading are performed by, and through attention to, material bodies. This is true even given the fact that "The Lifted Veil" turns on the ability of the narrator, Latimer, to read minds. From the beginning of the narrative, Latimer's own clairvoyant reading practices are anything but straightforward: rather than indicating his unmediated access to the minds and thoughts of those who surround him, they reveal instead Latimer's intense sensitivity to and focused attention on his own body and on the bodies of those whose minds he reads.

¹ While in some ways this similarity is coincidental, in others it is quite significant. One important consequence of the writing/reading distinction is the relative emphasis each activity places on experience and interpretation. In Chapter 2, I argued that *Villette* is a novel that is more productively experienced than interpreted, and that this difference in reading technique is matched by an analogous narrative style within the novel itself. Depictions of the experience of writing, of the production and consumption of text, suggest not only, as I argued above, that the novel presents writing as the ideal form of embodied presence, but also that the novel emphasizes the value of experience over that of interpretation. The act of reading is interpretive rather than generative, analytical rather than creative, and it tends to value (especially in *Villette*) distance rather than involvement. For all of these reasons, I argue that *Villette* – which has typically been read as a novel about surveillance, interpretation, and analysis – can and should be read as a novel about creativity, generation, and experience, all of which correspond much more comfortably to the productivity of writing than they do to the suspicious hermeneutics of reading. "The Lifted Veil," on the other hand, focuses both in its method and in its content on the act of reading. Yet, as I will argue throughout this chapter, it consistently presents reading as a somatic activity as much as, or more than, an imaginative or intellectual activity. While I will discuss this method of reading, along with its consequences, at length throughout this chapter, I want to note here that reading for Eliot is a fundamentally different project than it seems to be for Brontë, in that, for Eliot, reading is a necessary precursor to the development of morality: far from teaching suspicion, reading for Eliot teaches sympathy.

Acts of reading in “The Lifted Veil” are coextensive with attention to bodies, both the sensitive body of the reader and the perceptible body that is read. Such physiologically attuned reading is, for Eliot, an ethical imperative, and it provides a model for the kind of sympathy she advocates throughout her writing.

In many ways, Eliot is the archetypal advocate of sympathy: her insistence, both in her fiction and in her letters and essays, that art’s moral purpose is to expand the sympathies of its audience, is almost universally acknowledged. Generally figured as emotional connection, sympathy in Eliot’s conception instead involves a more complicated set of actions: Eliot’s sympathy results in emotional connection, but begins at the intersection of sensation and imagination. That is, Eliot’s sympathetic and sympathizing characters rely on acute and generally physiological perception in addition to the desire and ability to extend themselves emotionally into the experience of others. This version of sympathy involves both somatic perceptiveness and cognitive analysis: it involves, that is, the ability to read carefully. “The Lifted Veil” seems to present a radical challenge to Eliot’s notion of sympathy in that its clairvoyant – and thus, presumably, ideally sympathetic – first-person narrator rejects his companions in favor of near total egoism. Yet this apparently anomalous text shares similarities with Eliot’s larger body of writing: the issues of materiality and embodiedness within this novella are also present in the more canonical novels, and attention to this, the least typical of her fictional works, will shed light on the mechanisms underlying the development and deployment of sensation and sympathy throughout her oeuvre.

“The Lifted Veil” presents the first-person narrative of Latimer, a supersensitive young man who as a young adult discovers his ability to read the thoughts of others.

Beginning life as the second son of a wealthy businessman, Latimer becomes aware of his predilection for the beautiful over the practical at an early age; based upon a phrenologist's reading of his face and head, Latimer's educational program seeks to remedy this situation by focusing on science and math rather than literature and philosophy. As a university student, Latimer discovers his sensitivity to nature, but likens it to a diseased faculty, claiming that he is a being almost uniquely designed to experience pain. Later, while recuperating from a prolonged illness, Latimer finds that he can anticipate future events and see images of unfamiliar locations. The first instance of this "prevision" occurs when his father visits his sickroom and promises him a journey through Europe, including Prague, after his recovery. When he hears his father say the word, "Prague," Latimer has a vision of the city, which he has never visited. (Although the details of the city, when he sees them on his eventual visit to Prague, do not match those of his vision, Latimer finds in the atmosphere a confirmation of the essential accuracy of his prevision.) Some days later, alone in his room, Latimer sees his father enter his room accompanied by a neighbor from home and an unknown young woman; moments later, his father actually does enter his room, accompanied by both women from Latimer's vision. In both of these instances, Latimer's reaction to the uncanniness of the vision is loss of consciousness.

In addition to the prevision, Latimer discovers that he can read the thoughts of the people around him. Latimer's own isolation and growing misanthropy are confirmed when he finds, through reading his companions' minds, only pettiness and tawdriness in their thoughts and internal lives. Only Bertha, the young woman from his vision, remains unreadable to him; because she alone remains mysterious, Latimer pursues her in spite of

her self-professed heartlessness and her engagement to Latimer's brother, marrying her after his brother's sudden and unexpected death. Upon their marriage, Latimer's clairvoyance is extended to Bertha, and he reads in her mind the coldness and emptiness she had insisted from the beginning were there. The remainder of his life passes in psychological alienation and isolation, broken by only one (early) instance of emotional connection and sympathy with his father, who was grieving over his lost son, Latimer's brother. Latimer gradually loses his clairvoyance, particularly regarding his wife, but continues to experience disorienting visions of distant places, as well as of his own future death, the vision of which is the impetus for the narrative itself.

The climax of the tale begins when Bertha's maid, Mrs. Archer, becomes critically ill. Latimer's school friend, a doctor named Charles Meunier, is visiting at the time of Mrs. Archer's death; with Latimer's permission, he performs an experiment on Mrs. Archer's corpse immediately upon her death, in which he transfuses his own blood directly from his arm into Mrs. Archer's neck, whereupon Mrs. Archer's body becomes temporarily reanimated long enough to sit up and speak, accusing Bertha of plotting Latimer's murder by poisoning. After speaking, Mrs. Archer dies again. Latimer and Bertha remain married, but Latimer begins wandering, leaving each place before he can form any attachments out of fear that his clairvoyance will re-emerge and he will rediscover the emptiness, shallowness, and banality that he expects exists within those he lives near. The novella ends with Latimer narrating the beginning stages of his own death as he had foreseen, of angina pectoris, re-reading the narrative he has written, ending finally in an ellipsis as he (presumably) passes from consciousness.

Since its initial publication in 1859, "The Lifted Veil" has excited mixed critical

responses. Recognizing the apparent disjunction between “The Lifted Veil” and her previous writing, Eliot herself called it “a slight story of an outré kind – not a *jeu d’esprit*, but a *jeu de melancolie*.”² Her publisher, John Blackwood, had reservations about it, particularly about the revivification scene at the end; although he published it, without Eliot’s name, in the July 1859 issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, he declined to republish it, along with “Brother Jacob,” in an edition of her novels in 1866, saying, “They are both as clever as can be, but there is a painful want of light about them.”³ Sally Shuttleworth has pointed out how deeply ambivalent Blackwood must have been about the novella to have published it anonymously and consequently to have foregone the cachet (and likely financial benefit) her pseudonym would have brought the magazine given her recent success with *Scenes from Clerical Life*.⁴ More recent criticism has tended to focus on one of two main themes: the anomalousness of the text to the rest of Eliot’s writing, or the text’s connection to the extra-literary world in which George Eliot lived. More particularly, critics have focused largely on its perceived failures and lacks: the misogyny visible in the portrait of Bertha, the unrelenting hopelessness of its world, the apparent failure of both knowledge and sympathy, a sense of authorial anxiety, and failed experimentation.⁵ Those who have read the novella in a more positive light tend to

² Letter to John Blackwood, 31 March 1859, in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols. (New Haven and London, 1954-78), 3:41.

³ Letter from John Blackwood to George Eliot, 21 December 1866 (Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, 5:380).

⁴ Sally Shuttleworth, “Introduction” to “The Lifted Veil” (“*The Lifted Veil*” and “*Brother Jacob*” [New York: Penguin, 2001] xi-l), xii-xiii.

⁵ “The Lifted Veil” has been called variously a “failure” of aesthetic and philosophical synthesis (Carroll Viera, “‘The Lifted Veil’ and George Eliot’s Early Aesthetic” [*SEL* 24 (1984), 749-67], 750), a demonstration of Eliot’s “fear of disinterested, unrestricted knowledge, commonly taken as the intellectual’s chief characteristic” (Edward Hurley, “‘The Lifted Veil’: George Eliot as Anti-Intellectual”

focus on its connections to contemporary science, including the work done by George Henry Lewes.

On one hand, “The Lifted Veil” appears in many ways fundamentally different from Eliot’s other writing; in particular, its first-person narrator, who refuses or is unable to sympathize with the characters whose situations he presents, seems diametrically opposed to the more familiar, sympathetic narrator from her other novels, such as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Middlemarch* (1872), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

Nevertheless, it shares with these novels a preoccupation with the necessary means and consequences of human connection. Told as it is by an almost entirely egoistic narrator, “The Lifted Veil” clearly meditates on the ideas of sympathy and egoism. Eliot herself indicated the importance of sympathy in relation to the story in the epigram that accompanied the republication of “The Lifted Veil” in 1878:

Give me no light, great heaven, but such as turns
To energy of human fellowship,
No powers save the growing heritage

[*Studies in Short Fiction* 5.3 (1968), 257-62], 257), an example of Eliot’s anxiety over female authorship and her masculine pseudonym (Deanna Kreisel, “Incognito, Intervention, and Dismemberment in *Adam Bede*” [*ELH* 70.2 (2003), 541-74], 543), “a dramatization of the folly of pursuing Woman on the grounds that she represents a mysterious Other” (Kate Flint, “Blood, Bodies, and the Lifted Veil” [*Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51.4 (1997), 455-73], 456), and an outgrowth of the “now debunked, intrinsically Victorian phenomena of phrenology, mesmerism, and clairvoyance” (Beryl Gray, “Pseudoscience and George Eliot’s ‘The Lifted Veil’” [*Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 36.4 (1982), 407-23], 409). Other less negative critical responses have identified “The Lifted Veil” as an example of writing as vivisection (Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection: G. H. Lewes and George Eliot” [*ELH* 67 (2000), 617-53], 618), “an intervention in this [i.e. mainstream] scientific arena” (Flint, “Blood, Bodies, and the Lifted Veil,” 457), an exploration of the inherent tension between knowledge and mystery in Eliot’s conception of sympathy (Ellen Argyros, *Without Any Check of Proud Reserve: Sympathy and its Limits in George Eliot’s Novels* [New York: Peter Lang, 1999], 97), and “a meditation on the role of art in relation to the new definitions of life and death offered by a materialist science of body and mind” (Sally Shuttleworth, “Introduction,” xiv). In a very recent study, Jill Galvan, “The Narrator as Medium in George Eliot’s ‘The Lifted Veil’” (*Victorian Studies* [Winter 2006], 240-48), discusses Latimer as a mediating figure, a position she claims was fraught with significance for the mid-Victorians given the potential power figures such as telegraph operators and spirit mediums possessed not only to transmit but also to shape (or distort) information. All of these critics have focused either on the tale’s reliance on contemporary science or on its overall strangeness (or both).

That makes completer manhood.⁶

The epigram draws attention to the importance of sympathy both to her secular morality and to this tale: Eliot sent these lines along with a letter to Blackwood in which she wrote, “I care for the idea which it [“The Lifted Veil”] embodies and which justifies its painfulness. A motto which I wrote on it yesterday perhaps is sufficient indication of that idea.”⁷ Like *The Mill on the Floss*, the writing of which Eliot suspended in order to draft “The Lifted Veil,” the novella portrays vividly the necessity of sympathetic connection between humans, although, unlike *The Mill on the Floss* and her other novels, this narrative presents a world in which such sympathetic connection appears impossible.

On the other hand, it is true that Eliot was strongly influenced by the scientific research undertaken by George Henry Lewes that roughly coincided with her writing of “The Lifted Veil” in 1859. Critics such as Richard Menke, Sally Shuttleworth, Kate Flint, and Beryl Gray have demonstrated convincingly that George Eliot was thoroughly steeped in the scientific discourse of the mid-nineteenth century, and this connection to the scientific background helps to ground some of the tale’s Gothic extravagances in the material world.⁸ However, as helpful as this information about Eliot’s participation in

⁶ After her request to have “The Lifted Veil” and “Brother Jacob” included in the 1866 republication of her fiction was denied by John Blackwood, Eliot refused Blackwood’s request in 1873 to include “The Lifted Veil” in a collection of her *Blackwood’s* publications; however, at the same time that she refused his request, she sent these lines in a letter. When “The Lifted Veil” was republished in the Cabinet edition in 1878, the motto was included as an epigraph.

⁷ Letter to John Blackwood (Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 5:380). Quoted in Judith Siford, “‘Dismal Loneliness’: George Eliot, Auguste Comte and ‘The Lifted Veil’” (*The George Eliot Review: The Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship* 26 [1995], 46-52). Siford identifies “the main thrust of the narrative, the ‘idea’ which ‘justifies its painfulness’” as “its exposure of the catastrophe which accompanies the egoistic rejection of humanity” (46).

⁸ See, for example, Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection”; Sally Shuttleworth, “Introduction” and *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge

contemporary scientific conversations is, explicit references within the novella to scientific explorations do not account for either its anomalousness within Eliot's canon or for the narrative power of the story. Knowing the extent to which Eliot was aware of and relied on contemporary scientific knowledge makes some of Eliot's references clearer, but it does not erase the central issues of narrative reliability or ethics, both of which the novella seems intent on examining.

In this chapter, I argue that "The Lifted Veil" does more than either replicate in fictional form the contemporary science Eliot saw around her or replay an inverted version of her proverbial sympathy. While the concept of the body as mediating entity clearly owes much to contemporary science, the novella should not be reduced to a restatement of scientific thought. Instead, Eliot relies on contemporary science for the language of materiality, but then puts that concept to work in making explicit the theoretical grounding of her paradigmatic sympathy. The hostility that Latimer bears toward those around him is certainly markedly different than the tone most of Eliot's other narrators take in presenting their characters; yet while Latimer's approach might appear as the opposite of Eliot's usual sympathy, I argue that it relies on the same foundation of material embodiment.⁹

In order to make this argument, I begin with a discussion of Eliot's sympathy and its connections to narrative. From that foundation, the chapter moves to a brief discussion of the science upon which Eliot drew regarding the materiality of mind and

U P, 1984); Kate Flint, "Blood, Bodies, and *The Lifted Veil*"; and Beryl Gray, "Pseudoscience and George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'."

⁹ Consequently, while somatic sensitivity and awareness of materiality do not guarantee the presence of sympathy, the emphasis Eliot places on them is in clear distinction to the more usual conception of sympathy as non-material and imaginative, which I discussed in the Introduction.

being. It then connects the physicality of all of Latimer's experience and its consequent insistence on material embodiment both to the contemporary scientific concerns and to theories of reading and representation. Finally, I discuss the implications that this seemingly anomalous novella has regarding the way we make sense of sensation, bodies, and sympathetic reading practices in Eliot's more canonical novels.

Teaching Sympathy

Eliot's belief in the value of sympathy is proverbial: her narrators appeal to the sympathies of the reader on behalf of flawed characters; her characters chart their ethical development by learning sympathy for each other; and in her personal letters, Marian Evans explained the goal of her art as the desire that her readers "should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures."¹⁰ To say that Eliot's fiction insists upon the value of sympathy has become simply a critical commonplace.¹¹

Yet if Eliot's demand for sympathy is clear, the methods by which it is developed, and the means by which it is exercised, are quite complex. Knowledge is one important

¹⁰ Letter to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859 (Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 3:111).

¹¹ This does not, however, mean that all current critics are equally positive in their assessments of Eliot's sympathy. For example, Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 2000), connects the kind of sympathy Eliot advocates to a version of appropriative mimesis in which the sympathizing subject has the luxury of imagining the pain of another without actually being threatened with the experience of pain. Sympathy, for Jaffe, is essentially visual, a characteristic that emphasizes both its connection to intellect rather than to materiality and its distance from the point of actual experience. Hina Nazar, "Philosophy in the Bedroom: *Middlemarch* and the Scandal of Sympathy" (*Yale Journal of Criticism* 15.2 [2002], 293-314), on the other hand, argues that sympathy depends not on clear, accurate vision but rather on "the myopia of love, the conjugal bed" (310), suggesting that Eliot's sympathy depends more on the affective experience of love than it does on the intellectual experience of seeing-as-knowing that Jaffe describes. For a more extended discussion of sympathy, see Chapter 1, above.

component of Eliot's ethical sympathy, a characteristic made evident through the mediating presence of omniscient narrators in most of her fiction. These third-person narrators have access to the cognitive and affective lives of each novel's characters and, through this position of omniscient mediation, function as teachers of sympathy. They implicitly suggest that knowledge of another's situation should lead to a sympathetic extension between individuals, and they model that practice by presenting the interior conditions of characters to readers. Even unappealing characters in Eliot's novels tend to receive at least some narrative sympathy.¹² In suggesting that knowledge of another's situation should lead to the cultivation of sympathy, Eliot's narrators also serve as models of good readers. Through their omniscience, they perceive the actual situations of each character, as well as the reasons for each character's behavior. Knowledge allows for fair assessment; and, because for Eliot nearly all bad behavior – behavior that acts against the social impulse, that isolates rather than connects – comes from either painful experience or particular, uncontrollable, weaknesses, that assessment almost always leads to sympathy. This is not to say that Eliot's sympathy erases errors or indulges the egoistic tendencies of her imperfect characters. However, it is to say that Eliot's sympathy nearly always outweighs her criticism.

Knowledge alone, however, is insufficient for the development of sympathy, a fact that Latimer's antipathy should make clear. If knowledge were the sole requirement, Latimer's clairvoyance would guarantee his sympathetic stance, a situation numerous

¹² Casaubon, in *Middlemarch*, is a good example of this tendency. When, in chapter 20, the narrator asks why Casaubon's disappointed expectations are of less concern to the reader than are Dorothea's, the effect is, at least briefly, to imagine Casaubon's situation sympathetically. Neil Hertz, "Recognizing Casaubon" (*Glyph* 6 [1979]), notes this production of narrative sympathy for Casaubon.

critics have identified.¹³ For fiction to enlarge the sympathies of its readers, a writer must represent the details of a situation in order to instruct readers in the development of ethical sympathy, and reading becomes just such an instructional figure for the sympathetic relations between individuals. In order to present fictional characters, narrators must first “read” them: they identify relevant aspects of the fictional character, and then analyze and assess the value or significance of that character given the context of the fictional situation, often guiding their readers’ assessment as well. Readers of fiction, guided by the narrator’s representations, follow the same set of actions.

For Eliot, it is only through a detailed representation of a scene, event, individual, or situation that a reader’s sympathies can be expanded: consequently, attention to the details is a necessary component of ethical development.¹⁴ In her 1856 essay “A Natural History of German Life,” Eliot explicitly connects the need for close attention to specificity and materiality to the development of ethical sympathy. In that essay’s well known description of the ethical function of realist fiction, Eliot writes, “The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart

¹³ See, for example, Edward Hurley, “‘The Lifted Veil’: George Eliot as Anti-Intellectual.”

¹⁴ Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), identifies the historical association between detail and the feminine in the western aesthetic tradition. While many of Eliot’s most successfully sympathizing characters are female, it is not entirely clear that femaleness is a necessary constituent characteristic of sympathetic relations. *Daniel Deronda*, for example, provides one of the clearest and most successful models of the act of sympathy.

from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.”¹⁵ Although her immediate subject is the representation of “the people” – of laborers, rural farm workers, peasants – her comments insist upon a particular role of art in developing the ethical sympathies of its viewers. Generalities, according to Eliot, cannot be successful either in teaching or even in eliciting sympathy; only a viewer or reader predisposed to sympathy – whose sympathy is “ready-made” – might respond sympathetically to a scene composed of such images. In a letter describing the function of literature and aesthetic education, Eliot wrote that she valued “aesthetic teaching” as the highest kind of teaching, “because it deals with life in its highest complexity.” She goes on to note, however, that if aesthetic teaching “lapses from the picture to the diagram,” it becomes the worst, “most offensive,” kind of teaching.¹⁶ Eliot’s own fiction might be considered a kind of aesthetic teaching, in that it connects somatic perception to ethical reflection, insisting all the while on specificity over generality, on the picture over the diagram. In addition, Eliot’s letter makes clear the degree to which she understands specificity to be bound up with issues of corporeality and material experience: noting the difficulties of representation, Eliot asserts that she has “gone through again and again the severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit.”¹⁷ Ideas, for Eliot, are representable only in terms of embodiment and specificity; consequently, readerly sympathy, developed

¹⁵ [Marian Evans], “A Natural History of German Life,” *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856), 51-79. Reprinted in Nathan Sheppard (ed. and introd.), *The Essays of “George Eliot.” Complete* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 141-77. 145.

¹⁶ Letter to Frederic Harrison, 15 August 1866 (Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 4:300).

¹⁷ Letter to Frederic Harrison, 15 August 1866 (Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 4:300).

through close attention to the specifics of representation, is always connected to material and sensory experience.

In a particularly useful reading of Eliot's sympathy, Hina Nazar argues that sympathy for Eliot not only depends upon knowledge of the other for its development but also enables a particular kind of knowledge by the sympathizing subject. She traces the epistemological value of sympathy for Eliot to the conjunction of terms like "ideas" and "feelings" in Eliot's descriptions of sympathy, claiming that Eliot's sympathy offers a "critique of the disembodied and disembedded *cogito* of Cartesian epistemology."¹⁸ As Nazar reads it, Eliot's sympathy encourages the understanding and acceptance of particular ideas through its attention to affective experiences, and then turns that affective experience into a social impulse. While Nazar's focus is on the importance of affect, particularly love, to Eliot's epistemology of sympathy, I focus here on the presence of somatic feeling in that epistemology. Eliot's injunction "to imagine and to feel the pains and joys" of others incorporates not only cognition and affect but also – as is made clear not only by Latimer and his somatic reading practices but also by Eliot's more successfully sympathetic characters like Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke – somatic sensation.

George Eliot and Science

"The Lifted Veil" presents a particular theory of the body that connects Eliot's

¹⁸ Hina Nazar, "Philosophy in the Bedroom," 294. Nazar identifies the connection between Eliot's understanding of sympathy and the ways in which ideas and feeling are connected in the field of aesthetics, noting that Eliot shifts the aesthetic from feeling per se to "*feeling for social others*" (294; italics in original). Nazar argues that Eliot's sympathy, which combines knowledge with love, "signals a distinctively 'social' understanding of representation" (294).

moral sympathy with scientific materialism: the body as mediating entity not only between individuals but also as the sole medium through which one's mind or soul or psyche – one's *self*, if you will – recognizes and experiences itself in the world. “The Lifted Veil” explicitly examines the necessity for sympathy in terms of understanding and connecting to other individuals, but it implicitly suggests that as nonmaterial as emotional, moral, or psychological sympathy appears to be, it is ultimately inseparable from material embodiment, both the body of the object of sympathy and the body of the sympathizing subject. Far from being simply the housing of the psyche, that is, the body is the substance that shapes one's experience of the world and of oneself, one's own identity.¹⁹

While “The Lifted Veil” does not, I argue, exist primarily as a fictionalization of Victorian science, it is thoroughly saturated with the images, concerns, and language of that science. Richard Menke has drawn close parallels between the processes George Henry Lewes (and, to a lesser extent, Eliot herself) used in his laboratory experiments and the conditions of fictional creation itself.²⁰ At the same time that Eliot was drafting “The Lifted Veil,” Lewes was researching and conducting experiments for *The*

¹⁹ This accords well with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith; London: Routledge, 1962), asserts concerning the impossibility of separating the mind from the body, and the perceiving body from the object being perceived.

²⁰ Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection.” argues that “the analogy between fiction and vivisection is fundamental for Lewes, a veteran amateur physiologist known in the last years of his life as a defender of vivisection during widespread antivivisectionist agitation in Britain . . . [and that] Eliot's evolving theory of the novel, developed in collaboration with Lewes and articulated in both the literary essays she wrote before she became a novelist and in her fiction itself, takes her close to Lewes's theory of *écriture* as vivisection” (618). He goes on to connect “The Lifted Veil” to the gruesomeness and brutality of vivisection itself: “Latimer's supernormal perception flays the figures around him alive, in order to reveal their inmost thoughts and passions ‘in all their naked skinless complication’; with the acuity of the microscope, his narrated perceptions piece apart their inner lives even as they live them. His very consciousness, which is coextensive with the narrative itself, vivisections their minds” (629-30).

Physiology of Common Life (1859-60) and *Sea-Side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles, & Jersey* (1858). Menke connects Lewes's vivisection experiments, the goal of which was to ascertain precisely the internal workings of various bodily systems, particularly the nervous system and the brain, to the goal of realist fiction to lay bare the inner workings of the human psyche. In *The Physiology of Common Life*, Lewes concluded that "the brain is only one organ of the Mind, and not by any means the exclusive centre of Consciousness . . . Psychological Life has no special centre, any more than Physical Life has one special centre; it belongs to the whole, and animates the whole."²¹ This conclusion grew out of his work to determine the connections between pain and consciousness, both of which, Lewes came to believe, were rooted in the materiality of the body.

In addition to this general sense of correspondence between science and fiction, Lewes's scientific investigations are connected in two other specific instances to events in "The Lifted Veil." In particular, Lewes's interest in the functions and processes of circulation and respiration appear in fictional form in Eliot's story. In an unsigned *Blackwood's* article from 1858, Lewes presented preliminary research on blood and the circulatory system. As part of this article, he traces the history of blood transfusions, noting that one of the first human experiments was done on "a madman [who] arrived in Paris quite naked" and "was daringly seized . . . as the fitting subject for the new experiment." After a transfusion of eight ounces of calf's blood, followed by a good night's sleep and a similar transfusion the next day, the madman awoke sane, although he later relapsed into madness and died after a second treatment by transfusion. Lewes

²¹ G. H. Lewes, *Physiology of Common Life* II, 5.

notes that after a series of other deaths following transfusions, “in April 1668 the Parliament of Paris made it criminal to attempt transfusion,” but goes on to say that it has been “revived again in our own day . . . to be placed at last on a scientific basis.” Lewes recognizes the current knowledge that transfusions on humans must be done with human blood, but claims that “the practice is in some urgent cases not only safe, but forms the sole remedy.”²² In *The Physiology of Common Life*, published two years later, Lewes elaborates on this discussion of blood and circulation. For Lewes, the circulatory system, like the nervous system, works differently in lower animals: claiming first that constant blood circulation to the nerves is necessary for life, he clarifies this by saying, “This is only true, however, of warm-blooded animals. Frogs may have the aorta tied, and still possess the power of hopping about for some hours. They will even do this for an hour, when the heart and all the viscera are taken away.”²³ For higher animals and humans, blood is enormously powerful: Lewes relates claims by medical authorities that dog’s blood injected into a dead rabbit temporarily revived it, and that a heart that has stopped beating will begin beating again if arterial blood is injected into it. Latimer’s vision of his own death is similarly grounded in Lewes’s scientific knowledge. Lewes records the story of a man named Déal, living in France, who wanted to produce a “sensation” and was planning to commit suicide. He lit a charcoal fire in his closed room, and began to write a description of his sensations as the toxic fumes filled the room. The man’s suicide note, and his dead body, were found later, and his note, much like Latimer’s,

²² [G. H. Lewes], “Blood” (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* v. 83 [June 1858], 687-702), 698.

²³ G. H. Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life* I:193.

simply trails off, preceded by illegible handwriting.²⁴ It seems clear from this that both Latimer's own death and the reanimation scene at the end of "The Lifted Veil" are drawn directly from the most contemporary scientific and medical practice and experience. Latimer's painful suffocation, and Mrs. Archer's revivification, may be intended to provoke horror, but they do so through deliberately scientific means.²⁵

"A being finely organized for pain": Materiality and Sensation in "The Lifted Veil"

Latimer's clairvoyance would seem to indicate an emphasis of value on the non-material, on what cannot be gained through the material, embodied senses. After all, the unspoken thoughts of those around him impinge on Latimer's own consciousness in a way that seems to bypass sensory perception altogether. The ability to read minds suggests the existence of a private, interior identity and experience separate from the presence of the body: if private mental processes were commonly accessible through the senses, they would be external and public rather than private, and without the existence of such mental processes there would be nothing for a clairvoyant to read. A vital, if implicit, distinction between clairvoyance and other technologies of reading identity, such as physiognomy, lies in the complete separation between the perceptible material identity and the hidden mental processes. Physiognomy asserts that the body is

²⁴ Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 1:240-241. Peter Garratt, "A Dizzy Sense of Unreality": Science, Realism, and George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (*Ecloga Online Journal* [Autumn 2003], n.p.; Scottish Graduate Research Conference; <<http://www.strath.ac.uk/ecloga/documents/A%20Dizzy%20Sense%20of%20Unreality.doc>>), pays extended attention to Lewes's interest in this event, connecting it to what he identifies as an "unnarratable moment [Latimer's own death] which highlights the inadequacy of representational language."

²⁵ Sally Shuttleworth, in her "Introduction" to "The Lifted Veil," makes the point that, "although Eliot's tale seems to brush with the supernatural, its language throughout belongs firmly to the world of contemporary science" (xiv).

analogous to the character, that the two – being parts of the same whole – must reflect each other. Thus, for physiognomists, facial expressions, mannerisms, vocal intonations, gestures, or other bodily signifiers serve as illustrative evidence of unseen mental processes and characteristics. This is not how Latimer’s clairvoyance is characterized. Because clairvoyance works with unmediated access to another’s thoughts, it implicitly denies any reliance on clues that are perceptible by the senses.

Nevertheless, I argue in this chapter that Latimer’s mind-reading is more attentive to his sensory experience of his own body than it is to the private processes of his companions’ minds. One consequence of this argument may be that Latimer is thus an unreliable narrator. While this may be true, and while several critics have made just this argument, Latimer’s reliability is not my focus here, nor do I believe it was Eliot’s. The truth-value of Latimer’s narrative is not what the text prioritizes, even though it may be readers’ initial concern. Instead, it is Latimer’s insistence on his own bodily sensitivity as a technology of reading that is highlighted. In this section, I examine the somatic foundation of Latimer’s experience of and interaction with the material world in order to argue that, whatever else Latimer may claim to be reading, he is always paying primary and most significant attention to the sensations and processes of his own body.²⁶

Latimer opens his narrative with a description of the scene of his own death,

²⁶ Nicholas Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories” (*Victorian Studies* 46.2 [Winter 2004], 206-16), argues that Victorian theories of the novel emphasize the affective and physiological responses of readers far more than they focus on epistemology, which Dames associates with the novel theories of Henry James and later theorists. Dames argues that early genre theory combined “a positivist physiological psychology” and “aesthetic inquiry” along with “a sociology of a mass reading public” in order to produce a theory of the “novel-as-mode-of-consumption” (209). Latimer’s reading processes, directed as they are at the people around him while simultaneously referring so clearly to his own somatic experiences, provide a telling example of such an affective and physiological model of reading.

followed immediately by an invocation pleading for sympathy from his readers. In this request for sympathy, as is common throughout the tale, it is the body, atomized into its disarticulated parts, that acts as agent, not either the individual subjectivity nor even the intact body itself:

While the heart beats, bruise it – it is your only opportunity; while the eye can still turn towards you with moist timid entreaty, freeze it with an icy unanswering gaze; while the ear, that delicate messenger to the inmost sanctuary of the soul, can still take in the tones of kindness, put it off with hard civility, or sneering compliment, or envious affectation of indifference; while the creative brain can still throb with the sense of injustice, with the yearning for brotherly recognition – make haste – oppress it with your ill-considered judgments, your trivial comparisons, your careless misrepresentation. The heart will by-and-by be still . . . ; the eye will cease to entreat; the ear will be deaf; the brain will have ceased from all wants as well as from all work.²⁷

Explicitly a request for readerly sympathy and a statement of despair at its impossibility, this passage is remarkable for its insistence on the materiality both of that request and of the evidence of sympathy and alienation. It is the beating heart, the “entreat[ing]” eye, the receptive ear that plead for and register the presence and absence of sympathy. The opportunity to bruise the heart ends with the recipient’s death, as does the chance to “freeze” the hopeful eye and “put off” the receptive ear. Latimer’s conception of the interaction between narrator and reader seems both hostile and surprisingly somatic: the direct, second-person address places the absence of sympathy squarely in his reader’s field of (failed) obligation, while simultaneously making the request for, and denial of, readerly sympathy a matter of the desire of distinct, disconnected organs. It is the yearning eye, the hopeful ear, the “creative” brain that desire the reader’s response and

²⁷ George Eliot, “The Lifted Veil” in Sally Shuttleworth (ed.), *The Lifted Veil and “Brother Jacob”* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 4. All subsequent citations will be made to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as LV.

that sustain injury through the reader's rejection. This passage effectively accentuates the fundamental somaticism of Latimer's world and the degree to which he imagines human interaction, whether successful or thwarted, to be effected by means of the body.

As Latimer's introduction indicates, material sensation, particularly tactility, is the means through which he experiences every aspect of his existence. Latimer describes the experience of alienation and rejection in terms of crushing, bruising, and pressure, and his prevision of his death from *angina pectoris* connects issues of tactility, materiality, alienation, and lack of voice:

Just as I am watching a tongue of blue flame rising in the fire, and my lamp is burning low, the horrible contraction will begin at my chest. I shall only have time to reach the bell, and pull it violently, before the sense of suffocation will come. No one will answer my bell. I know why. My two servants are lovers, and will have quarreled. My housekeeper will have rushed out of the house in a fury, two hours before, hoping that Perry will believe she has gone to drown herself. Perry is alarmed at last, and is gone out after her. The little scullery-maid is asleep on a bench: she never answers the bell; it does not wake her. The sense of suffocation increases: my lamp goes out with a horrible stench: I make a great effort, and snatch at the bell again. I long for life, and there is no help. I thirsted for the unknown: the thirst is gone. O God, let me stay with the known, and be weary of it: I am content. Agony of pain and suffocation – and all the while the earth, the fields, the pebbly brook at the bottom of the rookery, the fresh scent after the rain, the light of the morning through my chamber-window, the warmth of the hearth after the frosty air – will darkness close over them for ever?

Darkness – darkness – no pain – nothing but darkness: but I am passing on and on through the darkness: my thought stays in the darkness, but always with a sense of moving onward. . . . (LV 3-4; ellipsis in original)

Sally Shuttleworth has identified the nineteenth-century association of fear and strangulation²⁸ with *angina pectoris*, suggesting as a consequence that “this is a highly

²⁸ Etymologically, “angina” comes from the Greek word meaning “strangling.” “Angina.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006).

appropriate disease for Latimer.”²⁹ The 1833 *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine* describes it as producing “something peculiar in its pain, whatever be its degree . . . as if it were combined with something of a *mental* quality. There is a feeling and a fear of impending death; and the primary symptoms of corporeal disorder are speedily modified by the consequences of mental impressions conveyed through the nervous system.”³⁰

In addition to having a solid grounding in nineteenth-century medicine, Latimer’s condition again highlights the degree to which his experience of the world around him, including his experience of his own subjectivity, stems from his body. His figurative voicelessness is given literal shape in the strangulation experienced in *angina*: the “horrible contraction” in his chest, the “agony of pain and suffocation” toward the end. Further, while Latimer here explicitly names his desire for mystery as something he might have wished for in death, the list of things he will miss is entirely material and sensory: he will miss the texture of the brook, the smell of rain, the sun’s light, the hearth’s warmth. Of these, only one – the sun’s light – is visual, while the others are immediate and tactile: texture and heat are experienced through the skin, through direct contact with another object, while smell can operate at a distance but nevertheless behaves in a material (rather than imaginative) way. Latimer experiences the fear associated with his condition somatically, as a sense of bodily strangulation; he also articulates his to-be-unfulfilled desire for life in terms of sensory experience, particularly touch. Materiality thus undergirds every aspect of Latimer’s experience of the world and

²⁹ Sally Shuttleworth, “Introduction,” footnote 1 (84-85).

³⁰ John Forbes, “Angina Pectoris,” in John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, and John Conolly (eds.), *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*, 4 vols. (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1833), I:82; quoted in Shuttleworth, “Introduction,” footnote 1, 84.

of himself in it: feelings in and on his body mediate all of Latimer's experience of connection and alienation, including his clairvoyance and prevision.

That he is prompted to relate his narrative by a vision of the scene of his own painful death is only one of many instances in which Latimer repeatedly draws attention to his own physical sensations. While Latimer's prevision and clairvoyance might seem to suggest vision as his primary mode of interaction, it is in fact tactility that structures his encounters with the world to a far greater extent than does vision: even within his prevision, the sensations Latimer reports are direct and material rather than distant and visual. His "vision" has the characteristics of direct experience rather than observation.

Even as a child, Latimer experiences the world through his body, in particular through touch rather than vision, a tendency accentuated by the fact that in childhood he "had a complaint of the eyes that made me blind for a little while" (LV 5). Latimer's childhood blindness makes him both more reliant on, and more susceptible to, tactile (and otherwise non-visual) interaction with his surroundings, with other people, and with himself. The immediacy, proximity, and reciprocity of touch insist upon materiality in a way that vision does not. Instead of describing his childhood in terms of vision, then, Latimer describes it in strikingly tactile terms: a lasting memory is of his mother's "caress as she held me on her knee – her arms round my little body, her cheek pressed on mine" (LV 5). The whole world becomes material and tactile to Latimer, with sound in particular a sense he experiences as intense, even overwhelming, bodily contact:

I remember still the trepidation and delicious excitement with which I was affected by the tramping of the horses on the pavement in the echoing stables, by the loud resonance of the grooms' voices, by the booming bark of the dogs as my father's carriage thundered under the archway of the courtyard, by the din of the gong as it gave notice of luncheon and dinner. The measured

tramp of soldiery which I sometimes heard – for my father’s house lay near a county town where there were large barracks – made me sob and tremble; and yet when they were gone past, I longed for them to come back again.
(LV 5)

Tramping, echoing, resonance, booming, thundered, din, gong, tramp: the clarity and precision, to say nothing of the intensity, with which these sounds are rendered indicate their importance in Latimer’s experience. Further, the language strongly suggests impact; all sound is produced through the contact of sound waves on the surface of the eardrum, but these sounds make especially clear their foundation in touch, friction, impact: horses’ hooves and carriage wheels on pavement, a gong being struck, soldiers’ boots on the road.

The narrative does not explain when Latimer’s blindness disappeared, so it is not clear whether the intensity of his sense experience may be due to his lack of vision; in any case, however, Latimer here represents a past sense experience in graphically tactile terms, making explicit as he does so the emotion produced through that contact. In fact, even the memory of his mother’s touch produces “sensation”: “even now, after the dreary lapse of long years, a slight trace of sensation accompanies the remembrance of her caress as she held me on her knee” (LV 5). The “trace of sensation” suggests that her touch creates a lasting impression on his skin, making tactility inescapably material, even permanent. That “trace” also suggests that Latimer bears the marks of the world on his body, that his interaction with others has always been mediated by his own somatic experience. His blindness simply emphasizes the thorough materiality of Latimer’s sensation: he cannot keep the world at a distance but is instead held close by it, and is in many cases the acted-upon object rather than the agent. The degree to which Latimer is

marked by his contact with the world recalls the King of Labassacoeur, into whose face written characters are engraved. The tone of Latimer's situation is not the high seriousness of the king's, but Latimer's sense of markedness is similar and suggests a similar imposition of the material world upon his body and his consciousness.

An important component of Latimer's early sensory experience, one mirrored in his later clairvoyance, is the intrusiveness with which sensory phenomena impinge on his bodily boundaries. The "trepidation and delicious excitement" produced by sounds that made him "sob and tremble" literally invade his space, force themselves on his ear, on his physical body, although Latimer's reaction to the invasiveness of sensory experience is far from simple, in that if the intrusiveness of the sounds is painful, Latimer also longs for it to recur. Later, the touch of Mr. Letherall, the phrenologist, is figured as an explicitly invasive one, which provokes unmixed feelings of resentment at the intrusion as he uses his hands to read and interpret Latimer's face and skull: he "took my small head between his large hands, and pressed it here and there in an exploratory, suspicious manner – then placed each of his great thumbs on my temples, and pushed me a little way from him, and stared at me with glittering spectacles" (LV 6). The phrenologist's touch produces in Latimer "a state of tremor" and "the agitation of my first hatred" at the commodification of his body by "this big, spectacled man, who pulled my head about as if he wanted to buy and cheapen it" (LV 6). Here, touch is the means not by which Latimer actively experiences his world but rather the means by which he is understood, read, measured as a passive object, evaluated, commodified by one in a hierarchical position of authority over him. Touch, then, is not simply a means of interaction with the world: it is also an invasion of Latimer's subjectivity, a material attack against which he must protect

himself. The educational program that grows out of the phrenological reading is also presented in acutely physiological terms: “I was hungry for human deeds and human emotions, so I was to be plentifully crammed with the mechanical powers, the elementary bodies, and the phenomena of electricity and magnetism” (LV 6). Turning to the sublimity of nature during his time in Geneva, Latimer finds himself not removed from the realm of embodied senses to disembodied intellect but rather, ironically, anchored even more firmly in his body: his sensitivity to “Nature in all her awful loveliness” (LV 7) gives his life in Switzerland “a perpetual state of exaltation” (LV 7), indicating that his experience of the sublime both takes him out of and paradoxically embeds him more firmly in his own body and its sensations.

All of this should make clear the degree to which Latimer encounters the world through his senses, particularly through the sense of touch. For Latimer, even his visions take place in the register of the somatic and tactile rather than the purely visual, suggesting the importance of materiality and immediacy in any encounter with the world or with other individuals. Even more significantly, though, Latimer’s experience of his own body and its sensations structures his perception of the world: that is, it is not simply that the phenomenal world impinges on his bodily boundaries in an inescapable way but that Latimer is constantly aware of and attuned to his sense of his bodily self. Latimer’s experience of his own body is generally that of pathology, and it shapes his perception of everything else. In particular, the physical and intellectual inadequacy that the phrenological reading reveals also highlights his insufficient masculinity and his belief that his physical inadequacy is necessarily connected to his poetic sensibility.

While the phrenological reading is designed to provide guidance to Latimer’s

educational program in order to capitalize on strengths and make up for weaknesses, its lasting impact on Latimer is to connect explicitly, for the first time, Latimer's body and his mind. Latimer represents himself as a child who was both emotionally and physically sensitive, but the phrenological reading locates all of Latimer's emotional and psychological experiences firmly in his body. His emotional sensitivity, according to phrenology, is preceded by and grounded in particular material characteristics of his body. This reading teaches Latimer that his mental and emotional experiences are formed and controlled by his body; this inseparability of mental and bodily existence and experience means that for Latimer, every cognitive or affective experience or response is already predetermined by his body. If Latimer represents his childhood experiences before the reading largely in terms of physiological sensation, after the reading it is the thorough saturation of the mental with the somatic that receives strongest emphasis. Phrenology locates all emotional, imaginative, and psychic experience in the body; likewise, Latimer experiences and knows his mind only insofar as he knows and experiences his own body.

Further, the phrenological reading convinces him that his body itself, in fact his entire constitution, is irremediably flawed: "A better-constituted boy would certainly have profited under my intelligent tutors" (LV 6). Latimer learns from the phrenologist that he is deficient through Mr. Letherall's "suspicious" examination of Latimer's skull, which leads to a conclusion of inadequacy: "The contemplation appeared to displease him, for he frowned sternly, and said to my father, drawing his thumbs across my eyebrows – 'The deficiency is there, sir – there; and here,' he added, touching the upper sides of my head, 'here is the excess. That must be brought out, sir, and this must be laid

to sleep” (LV 6).³¹ Latimer’s inadequacy relates explicitly to his intellectual capacity; yet the connections that phrenology makes between intellect and body make clear that an intellectual defect is coextensive with a physical defect. The physical evidence of the phrenologist’s judgment only reinforces Latimer’s own sense of his physical defectiveness: he is an organism “in an uncongenial medium” (LV 7), “a human being whose nature is not adjusted to simple human conditions” (LV 12).³² He describes himself as “fragile, nervous, ineffectual” (LV 14), with a face that bears “the stamp of a morbid organization, framed for passive suffering” (LV 14). Further, he characterizes his visions as “a disease – a sort of intermittent delirium, concentrating [his] energy of brain into moments of unhealthy activity” (LV 12), suggesting that the visions are a form of “diseased participation in other people’s consciousness” (LV 18). These descriptions underscore Latimer’s alienation from the social body around him and highlight the degree to which the somatic and psychic are interpenetrative.

³¹ Based on this description, it is not entirely clear which organs Mr. Letherall identifies as deficient or excessive. However, George Combe’s phrenological chart suggests that the eyebrows are associated with size, weight, number, and order. This makes sense given Latimer’s later description of the educational program instituted for him, with its emphasis on mathematics and science. The upper head is more difficult to determine, but it could be associated with the organ of ideality, which Combe describes thus: “Uses: Love of the beautiful and splendid, desire of excellence, poetic feeling. – Abuses: Extravagance and absurd enthusiasm, preference of the showy and glaring to the solid and useful, a tendency to dwell in the region of fancy and to neglect the duties of life.” (George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* [1828], 5th edn. [Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1835]; reprinted in Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth [eds.], *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* [Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998], 34).

³² According to physiologists like G. H. Lewes, the medium was generally understood as the social or environmental situation in which an organism lived. In this novella, it seems likely that Latimer’s “medium” was his own body, which does in fact prove “uncongenial.” This seems particularly possible when we consider Latimer’s assertion that he had a “poet’s sensibility” without the poet’s “voice”: Latimer can feel but not communicate, a social action figured here in terms of a bodily process.

Somatic Reading

Latimer's excessive sensitivity and impracticality, given bodily substance through the phrenological reading, also establish the association Latimer maintains through the end of his narrative between his own physical inadequacy and his poetic sensibility: "I thoroughly disliked my own *physique*, and nothing but the belief that it was a condition of poetic genius would have reconciled me to it" (LV 14). Latimer suggests that his physical weakness is a necessary corollary of his artistic gifts, an association that simultaneously implies that his brother's strong and healthy body houses a mediocre mind. If Latimer is "fragile, nervous, ineffectual," with a "half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty" (LV 14), his brother is "now a handsome self-confident man of six-and-twenty" (LV 14); underneath that handsome exterior, however, Latimer's clairvoyance detects only "petty promptings of his conceit and his love of patronage," along with "self-complacent belief in Bertha Grant's passion for him" and "half-pitying contempt" for Latimer himself (LV 14-15). Latimer associates his own physical weakness and unattractiveness with heightened emotional sensitivity and poetic potential, and equates Alfred's physical attractiveness with, at best, banality and, at worst, selfishness and contempt.

Alfred soon becomes the primary focus of Latimer's clairvoyance and, consequently, of his animosity:

Alfred . . . was bent on being extremely friendly and brother-like to me. He had the superficial kindness of a good-humoured, self-satisfied nature, that fears no rivalry, and has encountered no contrarities. I am not sure that my disposition was good enough for me to have been quite free from envy towards him, even if our desires had not clashed, and if I had been in the healthy human condition which admits of generous confidence and charitable construction. There must always have been an antipathy between our

natures. As it was, he became in a few weeks an object of intense hatred to me; and when he entered the room, still more when he spoke, it was as if a sensation of grating metal had set my teeth on edge. My diseased consciousness was more intensely and continually occupied with his thoughts and emotions, than with those of any other person who came in my way. I was perpetually exasperated with the petty promptings of his conceit and his love of patronage, with his self-complacent belief in Bertha Grant's passion for him, with his half-pitying contempt for me – seen not in the ordinary indications of intonation and phrase and slight action, which an acute and suspicious mind is on the watch for, but in all their naked skinless complication. (LV 14-15)

That Latimer claims to be reading Alfred's mind in making these determinations is not clear until almost two-thirds of the way through the passage when his "diseased consciousness" is first mentioned; prior to this, the insights Latimer is developing about Alfred's character seem based on inferences he is making rather than on direct knowledge. At some point, Latimer's horror at the deceptively attractive and average appearance of those around him gives way to an assumption that such average people must harbor nastiness inside them. That is, his brother looks healthy, is reasonably attractive, and seems generally kind enough to Latimer, yet Latimer believes his brother to be stupid and condescending; he bases this premise on the idea that healthy, average people like his brother *must* feel sorry for and condescend toward invalids like Latimer. Since he also believes that strong bodies cannot house strong intellects, Latimer reaches the reasonable conclusion that his brother must be dull. According to Latimer, Alfred was "florid, broad-chested, and self-complacent, feeling what a good-natured fellow he was not to behave insolently to us all on the strength of his great advantages;" "the good of this world falls" to people like his brother, who possess "ready dullness, healthy

selfishness, good-tempered conceit – these are the keys to happiness” (LV 25).³³

Further, in those instances in which Latimer has no particular clairvoyant access to the thoughts or intentions of another, his ability to read by the usual signs appears weak. For example, Latimer depicts Bertha as narrator and himself as helpless reader in their interactions before Alfred’s death:

And she made me believe that she loved me. . . . It costs a woman so little effort to besot us in this way! A half-repressed word, a moment’s unexpected silence, even an easy fit of petulance on our account, will serve us as *hashish* for a long while. Out of the subtlest web of scarcely perceptible signs, she set me weaving the fancy that she had always unconsciously loved me better than Alfred, but that, with the ignorant fluttered sensibility of a young girl, she had been imposed on by the charm that lay for her in the distinction of being admired and chosen by a man who made so brilliant a figure in the world as my brother. (LV 30)

Although he says here that he was the weaver of the fancy, Latimer depicts Bertha as the one clearly in control of this particular narrative, while he is left helplessly to read the story. He notes “the subtlest looks and phrases – feminine nothings which could never be quoted against her” (LV 16), the “words or slight actions” (LV 17) she uses to convince him that she preferred him over his brother. Even given this narrative control of Bertha’s, however, Latimer appears not to read the signs he relates to his own readers, not

³³ For a helpful analysis of nineteenth-century associations between strong intellects and healthy bodies, see Tamara Wagner, “‘Overpowering Vitality’: Nostalgia and Men of Sensibility in the Fiction of Wilkie Collins” (*Modern Language Quarterly* 63.4 [Dec. 2002], 471-500), who suggests that Collins, along with some other mid- and late-Victorian writers, challenged the growing association between health and morality or intellect developed at least partly by the “muscular Christianity” movement. Wagner connects Collins’s atypical male characters, who “eschew Victorian fashions of muscular masculinity,” to “the sentimental heroes of the late-eighteenth-century novel of sentiment or sensibility” (471). Latimer seems to be a similar masculine anti-hero, particularly given his self-identification as an artist and poet. A similar inversion of the usual association between beauty and goodness can be seen in other nineteenth-century fiction, including, for example, *Jane Eyre*, in which the conventionally unattractive Jane possesses not only acute intelligence but a strong sense of morality and justice, in contrast to the beautiful but selfish Georgiana. And Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver is the clear moral force of *The Mill on the Floss*, not her beautiful blonde cousin Lucy.

even to believe Bertha's own statements concerning her coldness and cruelty. His first vision of Bertha (confirmed later by the actual meeting) is of a person whose "face had not a girlish expression: the features were sharp, the pale grey eyes at once acute, restless, and sarcastic. They were fixed on me in half-smiling curiosity, and I felt a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting me" (LV 12). Nothing in her appearance suggests warmth or affection, and nothing in her self-presentation suggests a different character: "She was keen, sarcastic, unimaginative, prematurely cynical, remaining critical and unmoved in the most impressive scenes, inclined to dissect all my favourite poems" (LV 15). Nothing in the behavior that he reports about her confirms his claim that "Bertha's behaviour towards me was such as to encourage all my illusions" (LV 16). In fact, Latimer interprets even her direct statements of her coldness as evidence of her (unstated) feelings toward him:

'Tasso!' she said, seizing my wrist, and peeping round into my face, 'are you really beginning to discern what a heartless girl I am? Why, you are not half the poet I thought you were; you are actually capable of believing the truth about me.' The shadow passed from between us, and was no longer the object nearest to me. The girl whose light fingers grasped me, whose elfish charming face looked into mine – who, I thought, was betraying an interest in my feelings that she would not have directly avowed, -- this warm-breathing presence again possessed my senses and imagination like a returning siren melody which had been overpowered for an instant by the roar of threatening waves. (LV 26-27)

Bertha's touch, her "warm-breathing presence," override the very words she says, the truth she speaks about herself. Latimer misreads those signs, particularly her touch, as marks of affection from her instead of the literal statements of truth they are. As with his clairvoyance, Latimer's perception of Bertha is mediated by his own body and its sensations. In the absence of unmediated knowledge about Bertha, Latimer relies on his

own senses and sensations, grounded in his understanding of his own body, and imagines that what he desires actually exists.

That Latimer's insight reveals the internal lives of others to be congruous with their external appearance indicates one of three possibilities: 1) Appearance and interiority, surface and depth, actually coincide, and Latimer's clairvoyance provides an accurate reading of the thoughts and minds of other characters; 2) Latimer's insight is actually simply a method of close reading, and stems from very careful attention to external signifiers rather than a supernatural awareness of internal, mental activities; or 3) Latimer's insight is a projection of his own self-awareness, shaped by his experience of alienation, and relies neither on careful attention to visible signifiers nor on direct, unmediated access to other characters' internal lives. All three cases have implications for reading the connections between surface and depth, physiology and affective experience, bodies and interiority. Although the narrative encourages us as its readers to believe that Latimer's mind-reading ability exists literally, that narrative is Latimer's own production, without any critical distance or other verification.³⁴ Latimer's narrative makes clear not that he has unmediated access to the thoughts – the internal life, the meaning if you will – of others, but rather just how entirely mediated any act of reading is and how many layers exist between any reader and the meaning of any text: it calls into question, in fact, the degree to which such static and absolute meaning can even be said to exist in the absence of one able to decipher it.

Whether Latimer's assessment of his brother and, later, of Bertha, is correct is less

³⁴ As I noted above, it is not my purpose to establish Latimer's lack of credibility as a narrator; instead of credibility, what the lack of verification regarding Latimer's narrative suggests is that the content itself may not be at issue but rather his process of reading.

important than is establishing the foundation of that assessment. Latimer's insistence on his brother's banality and shallowness of character, always presented in implicit or explicit opposition to Latimer's own depth of affective experience, begins to suggest simply a new formula for assessment rather than actual unmediated access to Alfred's thoughts. Latimer's hyperawareness of his own (inadequate, unhealthy, insufficiently masculine) body seems to be at least as significant a factor in Latimer's evaluation of his brother as is clairvoyant access to Alfred's mind. My point here is not to suggest that Eliot's novella is not *really* about clairvoyance and prevision, nor is it to impugn Latimer's credibility as a narrator, although that may be a consequence. Instead, what becomes clear through attention to the presence of material embodiment and sensory experience is that all reading and interpretive practices, including Latimer's clairvoyance, take place by means of material sensitivity rather than through imagination or even cognition.³⁵ All acts of reading, in "The Lifted Veil," are performed by, and through close attention to, bodies. Latimer's sense of his own body, and his means of encountering the world somatically, through bodily senses, structures all of his interactions with other people, whether he encounters them clairvoyantly or more conventionally.

Even as a child, Latimer's senses interrupt his analysis: for Latimer, strong affective and somatic feeling prevents good reading. Contrary to what his education is intended to teach him, Latimer's focus throughout his youth is on immediacy and experience, often sense experience, rather than interpretation or understanding, and this

³⁵ As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, reading is a necessary part of the development and deployment of sympathy for Eliot. That reading practices in "The Lifted Veil" are based so strongly in somatic experience suggests that sympathy (also, for Eliot, a kind of reading practice) is similarly somatic.

emphasis on the immediacy of bodily, sensory experience over interpretation and analysis is consistent throughout Latimer's narrative. Lacking the desire to be "an improved man . . . who knew the reason why water ran down-hill," Latimer is "glad of the running water": "I did not want to know *why* it ran; I had perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so very beautiful" (LV 7). This emphasis on aesthetic experience³⁶ over interpretation has important consequences for how Latimer later engages with the people around him and calls into question what exactly Latimer is reading concerning his companions.

I have argued that all acts of reading in "The Lifted Veil" are necessarily material and involve the body of the reader. Within this system of reading, Latimer is both a typical and a careful reader in that he is somatically sensitive and responsive. The actual reliability of Latimer's mind-reading ability may be less important ultimately than the fact that the narrative itself invites doubt: what Latimer discovers in his companions' minds is ultimately too predictable for his readings to be accepted at face value as products of clairvoyance. Because my purpose is not simply to question Latimer's reliability, I instead want to draw attention to the foundation of reading that Eliot presents in this novella. This story does not, I think, simply represent the disastrous effects of a narrator who knows everything but still fails to sympathize. Instead, it demonstrates what happens when reading, which is always somatically sensitive, becomes self-referential and circular. That is to say, I argue that if Latimer is unreliable as a narrator, it is not because he lies and misleads regarding what he finds in the minds and psyches of

³⁶ Again, this emphasis on experience rather than interpretation echoes Nicholas Dames's argument regarding Victorian theories of novel-reading.

those around him, but because he is always simply reading himself: when he reads Alfred's banality, he is more accurately reading his own inadequate, unhealthy body. Good readers, for Eliot, begin with somatic sensitivity. Latimer is a bad reader *not* because he attends excessively to the somatic instead of to the psychic texts around him, but because (and to the extent that) he is always, endlessly, reading himself; his readings are always self-referential, never other-directed; they exhibit the "ineffable ennui of hermeneutic narcissism"³⁷ in that every reading Latimer produces is always really a reading of himself.

A story first and foremost about reading, "The Lifted Veil" provides us with multiple examples of bad readers, as well as of bad (indecipherable) texts against which readers must wield their skills. The literal act of reading supposes that textual marks connect in meaningful ways with referents beyond themselves; that is, it assumes congruence between surface (the words on the page) and depth (some "real" "truth" or meaning whose existence is both referred to and represented in the words). Correspondence between surface and depth supposes that what is seen connects exactly and unproblematically with what is meant: the words one chooses express one's ideas, and symbols (such as red octagonal signs) indicate only one clear meaning (stop). We might understand the surface of a person as that which is visible or otherwise immediately accessible: appearance, including skin, body parts, clothing; facial expressions; gestures; even spoken words. Depth, on the other hand, is a less straightforward concept: it can be imagined materially, psychologically, even ethically.

³⁷ Thomas M. Greene, "On the Category of the Literary" (*Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 13.2 [June 1986], 217-24), 218.

When imagined materially or spatially, depth suggests that what is hidden by one's visible surface is simply more body, internal organs, tissue, blood. When imagined psychologically or spiritually, depth suggests that the visible surface conceals the thinking, perceiving mind, the Cartesian "self." Physiognomy and phrenology as Victorian methods of reading suggest a correspondence between what is materially perceptible on the body's surface and what constitutes the individual's sense of self; for physiognomy, that relationship is one of analogy while for phrenology it is direct and causal, but in both cases, the surface-depth relationship is one of signifier-signified, and both pairs of terms correspond closely.³⁸

In all of these instances, "surface" is understood to be material while "depth" is understood as non-material; yet this opposition is not necessarily constant. As Christina Crosby and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have pointed out, this very relationship between surface and depth, a relationship predicated on both a distinction between the two and a closeness of identification between them, is often called into question in Gothic texts.³⁹ That is, within Gothic literature, the surface itself – the location of the visible signifiers – maintains its significance without any necessary correlation between that surface and a

³⁸ Metaphorically, surface and depth are expected to align closely (if not exactly) in terms of an individual's self-presentation: one indicates who one is – one's stable identity or character – by one's appearance and choice of visible signifiers (clothing, appearance, even facial expressions). While such visible signifiers are often said to be misleading, even deliberately so, the immediate expectation still appears to be that one's appearance and manner function as reliable indicators of one's character and identity, and demonstrated disjunctions between appearance and character consequently lead to charges of hypocrisy or falseness; reactions can range from feelings of betrayal to violence, depending upon the type of information withheld or misrepresented. In this model, human "depth" or "interiority" is figured as psychological, emotional, or moral: that is, as thoroughly non-material, in distinct contrast to the outside, the visible surface of the body.

³⁹ Christina Crosby, "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text" (*SEL* 24 [Autumn 1984], 701-15); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986) and "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel" (*PMLA* 96.2 [Mar 1981], 255-70).

supposed depth of meaning below it.⁴⁰ The Gothic, according to Crosby and Sedgwick, privileges the surface in distinct contrast to most non-Gothic literature. In this most Gothic of Eliot's narratives, a similar disconnection between surface and depth appears; in this case, however, it is both a privileging of surface as repository for meaning *and* a reflection of the difficulties – even the impossibility – both of reading that surface and of thereby knowing the meaning it reflects.

Embodied Sympathy in *Middlemarch*

Latimer's complete egoism and failure to sympathize place him outside Eliot's ethical pale. Nevertheless, while Latimer fails as a sympathetic narrator and reader, his emphasis on somatic experience is not the reason for his failure. In fact, such an insistence on material and sensory experience is at the heart of Eliot's successfully sympathizing characters' ability to form sympathetic connections. Far from interrupting or derailing the processes of sympathy, acute sensitivity to embodied sensation actually forms the basis of Eliot's hermeneutic and epistemological sympathy. Many of Eliot's protagonists, including Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, and Daniel Deronda, exhibit a similar level of somatic sensitivity in the context of, and in service to, sympathetic

⁴⁰ The nun in *Villette* can serve as an example of this phenomenon of dislocation between sign and referent. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the figure of the nun can be connected to multiple "meanings": it is a ghost, a hallucination, the personification of the restrictions Catholicism places on women, among many others. The indeterminacy of the nun's identity until late in the novel may make its epistemological status unclear, but it in no way disrupts or cancels the uncanniness the figure provokes. Similarly, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is riddled with inconsistencies: for example, vampires must rest in hallowed ground, but Dracula takes refuge in the distinctly un-hallowed ground of a suicide's grave, while Van Helsing's "hallowing" of the boxes of earth by sprinkling holy water on them makes them uninhabitable for the vampire. As in much Gothic fiction, the general feeling of horror or unease in these novels is unaffected by textual inconsistencies, because the images themselves – the nun, the juxtaposition of the holy and the unholy – produce that horror or uneasiness absent any actual connection to a referent. Because the symbols are allowed significance on their own, they function to increase the novel's depiction of horror or uncanniness and need not, consequently, carry any significance beyond their own existence in the text.

connection. Because *Middlemarch* presents some of Eliot's clearest articulations of the importance and the process of sympathy, and because passages from *Middlemarch* eerily echo passages from "The Lifted Veil," I take it here as a point of comparison. Eliot's proverbial sympathy may be turned radically on its head in Latimer's narrative, but its traces are apparent; by connecting this seemingly anomalous text to her other more canonical writing, the foundations of her secular morality can be understood as principally material.

Eliot's intensely sympathetic protagonist, Dorothea Brooke, illustrates the intersection of the material and the emotional in this conception of sympathy: she experiences all emotion physically. From the beginning of the novel, Dorothea's perception, both sensory and emotional, is an object of narrative comment, which highlights its importance both to her character *and* to the mode of its textual representation: both sensual and emotional experience is represented textually as somatic sensation, suggesting that Dorothea physically experiences and embodies her emotions. Instances of Dorothea's experience of and responsiveness to physiological sensation abound, and she revels in sensory experience, much of which is presented in terms that emphasize immediacy and tactility over distance and vision. For example, when Celia first mentions their mother's jewelry, Dorothea's religious scruples prevent her from admiring their beauty. But when Dorothea sees one of the pieces, "a fine emerald with diamonds," just as the sun, emerging from behind a cloud, lights it up, she is transfixed by the gem's beauty: "'How very beautiful these gems are!' said Dorothea, under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. 'It is strange how the colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual

emblems in the Revelation of St John.⁴¹ They look like fragments of heaven” (*M* 6).⁴²

While Dorothea connects the gems to their emblematic religious significance, her pleasure in them is thoroughly material: the “new current of feeling” suggests an electrical thrill, an involuntary somatic response to a powerful impulse, a suggestion furthered by the penetration of the gems’ colors. Even visual experience operates materially and tactilely: colors penetrate and operate like scent; the light from the sun transforms the gems into “fragments of heaven” that Dorothea experiences as an electrical thrill. In spite of her religious objections to self-ornamentation, Dorothea wears the emerald ring and bracelet and “thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour” (*M* 7). Dorothea’s aesthetic pleasure in the jewelry operates synaesthetically, in multiple senses at once, and is represented as simultaneously active and passive: the emerald’s color “penetrat[e]” Dorothea’s senses even as she imagines “feed[ing]” on it. If Celia’s response is enthusiastic about the beauty of the gems and excited about the possibility of wearing what flatters her appearance, Dorothea’s response is both quieter and more significant, in that it moves beyond simple appreciation of appearance and involves her whole body.

Dorothea’s love of horseback riding similarly illustrates her fundamental

⁴¹ Revelation 4 and 21 contain passages about gems: “At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne” (Revelation 4:2-3); the New Jerusalem is also described in terms of the gems used to construct it: “The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass” (Revelation 21: 18-21).

⁴² George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977). Subsequent references to this novel are to this edition, and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *M*.

alignment with the pleasures of somatic sensation. Even in her conflict over the fitness of the pleasure she takes in material objects and physical activity, Dorothea remains firmly (if not unproblematically) embedded in material, sensory experience: “Most men thought her bewitching when she was on horseback. She loved the fresh air and the various aspects of the country, and when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasure she looked very little like a devotee” (*M* 3). While part of Dorothea’s pleasure in riding consists, the narrator tells us somewhat sarcastically, in “looking forward to renouncing it,” Dorothea nonetheless enjoys riding “in a pagan sensuous way” (*M* 3). Dorothea’s eyes glow after riding, but not in the way of a religious devotee; her enjoyment is presented as purely sensual, “pagan,” without spiritually redeeming significance attached to it. Again, though, Dorothea’s thoroughly material enjoyment of sensory pleasure is presented in terms that suggest the transformation of the sublime: while the narrator explicitly claims that Dorothea’s post-riding glow is not that of a “devotee,” her appearance actually suggests that she *is* such a person: if her eyes at other times glow with religious fervor, here they glow with dedication to the transformation associated with somatic pleasure.⁴³

The Casaubons’ disappointing honeymoon trip to Rome provides another instance in which Dorothea’s physiological perceptiveness is figured as so sensitive as to be overwhelmed by the material world around her.

The weight of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs to whom it formed a background for the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign

⁴³ While these passages can be read as a contradiction of Dorothea’s declared dedication to spirituality, I read them as evidence that, for Eliot, the distinction between the spiritual and the material is very narrow; further, I argue throughout this chapter that materiality and somatic experience actually lead, in Eliot’s novels, to spiritual and moral development.

society; but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions. Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence . . . all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years. . . . [I]n certain states of dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued to see the vastness of St Peter's, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina. (*M* 134-135)

Rome is both “unintelligible” – inaccessible to Dorothea’s intellect – and heavy, a weight against which Dorothea cannot defend herself. What Dorothea sees in Rome marks her with “deep impressions.” Like Lucy Snowe, Dorothea bears the marks on her body of her encounter with the world’s disappointments and difficulties. This passage illustrates both Dorothea’s fundamental susceptibility to sensory experience and the degree to which the senses operate collectively rather than individually: that is, what Dorothea *sees* “jar[s] her as with an electric shock,” causes her body to ache, takes “possession of her young sense,” etch themselves permanently in her memory. Even when vision operates solely as vision, it is a vision that is touched by what it sees. In an inverse process of haptics, Dorothea’s eyes are touched, marked by what they see: the red drapery, a kind of after-image burned on Dorothea’s eyes, has effectively shifted Dorothea from the position of perceiving subject into the position of marked object. Like Latimer, who as an adult still feels the sensation of his mother’s arms, Dorothea continues to experience the draperies as a kind of psychological and physical scar. If, as I have discussed in

previous chapters, vision is generally identified with distance and detachment, vision for Dorothea is a fully embodied sense, one that has material impact on her other senses simultaneously.

Although Rome affects Dorothea primarily in psychologically painful ways, mixed with this pain is a certain sense of pleasure in the excess of sensation: the “vast wreck” that “at first jarred her as with an electric shock” later produces an “ache” in Dorothea; the painfulness of an electric shock gives way to an “ache” that suggests not only a less straightforward pain but also a sense of pleasure, even an eroticization of the painful excess. Similarly, the sense of possession offered in this passage suggests less a sense of pain per se than a sense of the loss of individuality, of subjecthood, a sensation implicated in both the emphasis on pain and in the suggestions of eroticism.

Connecting all of these instances of intense affective and somatic sensation is an insistence that all such sensation is, at its root, physiological; further, the emphasis on tactility, on contact between the surface of the body and outside objects, makes the fundamental materiality of all sensory experience inescapable. The penetration of the emeralds’ color, the sensuousness of fresh air and outdoor activity, the weight of Rome, the electric shock of Italian culture, the disease of the retina: all suggest not only that affective states are manifested somatically, but that Dorothea experiences everything through her body.

If Dorothea is as fully embedded in sensory experience as Latimer is, she relies in similar ways upon attention to bodies in her sympathetic reading. Dorothea’s conversation with Rosamond Lydgate, a turning point in the novel, not only reinforces the degree to which Dorothea’s experience is connected to her body but also provides a

clear example of somatic reading that works sympathetically. This suggests that Latimer's failed reading and failed sympathy are due less to the primacy of somatic experience and more to the endless self-referentiality of his reading practices. Dorothea, as an ethically attuned reader, begins her sympathetic reading of Rosamond with acute physiological sensation, but instead of confusing her own physiological experience with that of her correspondent, Dorothea focuses her perceptive acuity on Rosamond, allowing her to turn physiological sensitivity into sympathetic reading.

Dorothea has come to Rosamond in an attempt to save the Lydgates' marriage and Will Ladislaw's character. Having come to deliver a message for Mr. Lydgate the day before, Dorothea sees Will and Rosamond in a compromising situation, alone together in Rosamond's house when Rosamond's husband is out: "she saw, in the terrible illumination of a certainty which filled up all outlines, something which made her pause motionless, without self-possession enough to speak" (*M* 534). What Dorothea sees is a tearful Rosamond, with Will "leaning towards her," clasping "both her hands in his" and speaking "with low-toned fervour" (*M* 534). In spite of her catastrophic disappointment in Will's apparent (and inappropriate) attention to Rosamond, Dorothea, attempting to avert a "crisis . . . in three lives whose contact with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been suppliants bearing the sacred branch" (*M* 544), goes to Rosamond again to try to convince her not to betray her husband's trust and, consequently, her own best self. Dorothea, acting on "simple inspiration" (*M* 547), finds herself unable to speak at first because of intense emotion and can only sit close to Rosamond until she composes herself enough to speak to Rosamond of Lydgate's goodness: "Dorothea, completely swayed by the feeling that she was uttering, forgot everything but that she was speaking

from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's. The emotion had wrought itself more and more into her utterance, till the tones might have gone to one's very marrow, like a low cry from some suffering creature in the darkness. And she had unconsciously laid her hand again on the little hand that she had pressed before" (*M* 548).

Dorothea's ability to sympathize here may in fact be as much a misreading of Rosamond as any that prompts Latimer's misanthropy; as the narrator makes clear, Rosamond's own ethical development, which happens during the course of this conversation, takes place only through Dorothea's actions. In other words, Dorothea is not reading and responding to an ethical impulse in Rosamond, but is rather feeding a transformative sympathetic impulse to Rosamond. Rosamond is "taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own" (*M* 550), suggesting that Dorothea's sympathy relies less on the kind of reading I identified earlier in this chapter than it does on sheer power of personality: Dorothea wills Rosamond to become the ethical person Dorothea wants to read, and so Rosamond becomes that person, at least temporarily. Nevertheless, Dorothea's interaction with Rosamond, while explicitly affective and sympathetic, is represented in the register of bodily experience: Dorothea takes Rosamond's hand; they sit close together; Rosamond kisses Dorothea's forehead when words fail her. More importantly, though, Dorothea experiences her own sympathy for Rosamond in her body: "The revulsion of feeling in Dorothea was too strong to be called joy. It was a tumult in which the terrible strain of the night and morning made a resistant pain: -- she could only perceive that this would be joy when she had recovered her power of feeling it. Her immediate consciousness was one of immense sympathy without check; she cared for Rosamond without struggle now, and responded earnestly to her last words" (*M* 551). In

her somatic experience of sympathy, Dorothea recognizes the ethical process of sympathetic reading (or, perhaps, misreading) by means of her bodily sensations.

The coincidence of pleasure and pain in this highly important and emotionally charged episode suggests that Dorothea (along with Eliot) values physiological sensation and perceptiveness per se: pain brings pleasure because it makes one *feel*, because it both increases and marks one's sensitivity. As I will argue in the next chapter, there appears to be a basic valuing of sensation as such rather than particular kinds of (useful or practical or moderate) sensations; in the context of this chapter, I would suggest simply that the "resistant pain" that Dorothea experiences will be transformed into pleasure – joy – once Dorothea regains her ability to feel. Functioning as a reinforcement to this mixture of pleasure and pain is Dorothea's desire for ascetic renunciation, which manifests itself as both a lack, an absence of what gives pleasure, and as a desire for sensation. The gems whose color affects Dorothea so deeply simultaneously offer her something to renounce, as does her pleasure in riding horses: "Riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it" (*M* 3). In addition to these opportunities to give up a pleasure, Dorothea's decision to marry Casaubon links her to another sort of asceticism and renunciation; equating the marriage to a "hair shirt" (*M* 40), Mrs. Cadwallader calls attention to the extravagance of Dorothea's religious sense through the image of Dorothea's conscious penitence in marrying Casaubon. Although Dorothea believes herself to be marrying Casaubon for reasons largely unrelated to asceticism, the image of the hair shirt connects Dorothea to a particular form of penitence that revels in the intentional mortification of the senses. Yet the punitive

intent of such a garment disguises the fact that it would be productive of sensation: donning a hair shirt would not only not eliminate sensation but would rather increase and emphasize sensation. Dorothea's asceticism is often of the sort that produces ecstasy of sensation; this ecstasy ties the "pain" of renunciation to pleasure, while it simultaneously invokes an echo of the mixture of pain and pleasure brought on through her conversation with Rosamond.

Kathryn Bond Stockton situates Eliot's conception of sympathy in connection to Ludwig Feuerbach's philosophy, noting that "Feuerbach conceived his work as 'a frankly sensuous philosophy' [in which] he strove to unite spiritual existence with bodily existence."⁴⁴ "Inasmuch as human feeling *is* God," writes Stockton, "sympathy touches upon the sensuousness that for Feuerbach 'unites' spiritual and material, inner and outer."⁴⁵ Sympathy in *Middlemarch* (and, perhaps surprisingly, antipathy in "The Lifted Veil") bears clear similarity to such a Feuerbachian construction that connects bodily and psychological sensation.

In Dorothea, Eliot insists upon the value – epistemological and ethical – of sensation, particularly physiological sensation. Like Latimer, Dorothea is acutely perceptive somatically; while her vision may be less than acute, her sense of touch is highly sensitive. Clearly, then, Latimer's antipathy and misanthropy cannot be attributed to his overinvestment in bodily sensation; paying close attention to material existence is not the primary reason Latimer is a bad and unsympathetic reader. Instead, it is the

⁴⁴ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1994), 185.

⁴⁵ Stockton, *God Between Their Lips*, 189.

direction of one's attention that determines one's ethical development: while Latimer's attention is turned morbidly upon itself, making all of his readings by definition self-referential and anti-sympathetic, Dorothea's attention is turned toward others, toward social engagement.⁴⁶ A recent critic has argued that Dorothea has a "frail connection with her own bodily and instinctive self."⁴⁷ Yet, as this brief discussion should illustrate, Dorothea's connection to her own body, and the connection between that somatic experience and her ethical stance, is clear. In making Dorothea's somatic experience so very clear, Eliot suggests that Dorothea's ethical strength lies in her bodily susceptibility, her sensitive permeability: without it, the novel suggests, Dorothea's philanthropic impulse would remain at best ineffective and undirected. While, as Latimer makes abundantly clear, somatic sensitivity alone does not guarantee the development of sympathy, it is the characteristic that allows Dorothea to connect successfully with other people and thus to put into practice her philanthropic urge. Dorothea's connection to her body is what constitutes Dorothea's moral self.

As a perverse version of an omniscient narrator, Latimer uses as evidence of his clairvoyance the discontinuity between the attractive outer forms of those around him and the ugliness, emptiness, and banality of their psychic, spiritual, and emotional lives. And

⁴⁶ What is most striking about the comparison between Latimer and Dorothea is not that Latimer's antipathy has its roots in egoism, but rather that Dorothea's sympathy has its roots in materiality. If we return to Amanda Anderson's analysis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which I discussed in the Introduction, and her assertion that, for Barrett Browning, it is only the "cultivation of spirit . . . [that] elevates a fallen humanity" (Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* [Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993], 172), Dorothea's reliance on somatic experience assumes a much greater importance through its contrast with Anderson's (and Barrett Browning's) insistence on non-materiality. While Dorothea is certainly ethical, in a way that Latimer fails to be, because she turns her attention outward, I argue that the foundation of her turning outward is material and immediate rather than imaginative and detached, which suggests that, for Dorothea (and for Eliot), embodiment is as necessary to the development of sympathy as the philanthropic social impulse is.

⁴⁷ Sarah Wintle, "George Eliot's Peculiar Passion" (*Essays in Criticism* 50 [2000], 23-43), 28.

yet, as I have argued in this chapter, the discontinuity he asserts does not really act as evidence of his clairvoyance. Instead, this novella presents a version of material embodiment that questions, even effectively denies, the existence of a separate and non-material interiority, suggesting that individual identity is coextensive with material embodiment. Latimer's lack of sympathy has its foundation in his experience of his own body; further, it is through his material perception and experience of the world around him, as well as of his own body, that he comes to distrust the people who surround him. This tale emerges from Latimer's complicated reading practices at the intersection of clairvoyance, close reading, and self-absorption, and it is this intersection that both generates and forestalls Latimer's sympathy. Framed by descriptions of his own experience of impaired bodily health, Latimer's narrative explores implicitly the connections between and among his physicality, his heightened sensitivity, his experience of pain, his apparent ability to read minds, and the conditions of narrative and sympathy. By opening his tale with a prediction of the scene of his own death, and consequently by situating his tale within the experience of his own body, Latimer foregrounds and emphasizes the important mediating role that his body plays in the construction of his autobiography and in the success or failure of all attempts at human connection.

Chapter 4

Representational Conflicts: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Materiality in D. G. Rossetti and A. C. Swinburne

It is well known that Robert Buchanan's famous review of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," finds fault with Rossetti's poems for being too invested in the experience of the body: "[T]he fleshly gentlemen," Buchanan writes of Rossetti, Swinburne, and William Morris, "have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must be an intellectual hermaphrodite, to whom the very facts of day and night are lost in a whirl of aesthetic terminology" (FSP 335).¹ And again: "But the fleshly feeling is everywhere . . . [I]t is generally in the foreground, flushing the whole poem with unhealthy rose-colour, stifling the senses with overpowering sickliness, as of too much civet" (FSP 339). In addition, however, and somewhat paradoxically, Buchanan's review also criticizes Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelites for being too picturesque, too painterly. He calls "The Blessed Damozel" "a careful sketch for a picture, which, worked into actual colour by a master, might have been worth seeing" and identifies its "general effect" as "that of a queer old painting in a

¹ Thomas Maitland [Robert Buchanan], "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti" (*The Contemporary Review* 18 [August-November 1871], 334-350 [in Jerome J. McGann, ed., *The Rossetti Archive: The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*]; retrieved 22 February 2006 from <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.c7.18.rad.html>>. All quotations from this essay are from the Web version and will be noted parenthetically in the text as FSP.

missal, very affected and very odd,” suggesting that it somehow lacks a clear sense of material embodiment (FSP 340). “We hover uncertainly between picturesqueness and namby-pamby . . . The thing [“The Blessed Damozel”] would have been almost too much in the shape of a picture, though the workmanship might have made amends. The truth is that literature, and more particularly poetry, is in a very bad way when one art gets hold of another, and imposes upon it its conditions and limitations. In the first few verses of the Damozel we have the subject, or part of the subject, of a picture, and the inventor should either have painted it or left it alone altogether; and, had he done the latter, the world would have lost nothing. Poetry is something more than painting; and an idea will not become a poem because it is too smudgy for a picture” (FSP 341). Readers of Buchanan’s review tend to emphasize his indictment of Rossetti’s materialism, but what most interests me here is the complexity of the criticism. Rossetti’s work is condemned *both* because it demonstrates too great an investment in the purely material aspects of human existence *and* because it lacks engagement with the realities of life: it is simultaneously too enmeshed in the grime of bodily existence and too distant from it.²

In a sense, my argument parallels Buchanan’s. Like Buchanan, I argue that the poetry of Rossetti and Swinburne demonstrates a complicated stance toward material embodiment, which is evident in the conflicting representations of bodies as iconic or abstracted and bodies as thoroughly and realistically material and individual. Unlike Buchanan, however, I claim that the tension that results from these conflicting

² According to J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), objections to Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry on these grounds were not uncommon: “[T]he critic of the *Builder* complained that it [contemporary art] is devoid of ‘the true and normal forms of nature’ and ‘is alien to our real experience’” (150; quoted passages are from *Builder* 35 [1872], 439-440; 439).

representations suggests a necessary, if uneasy, connection between embodiment and humane-ness.³ I am not trying here to recuperate either Swinburne or Rossetti into the tradition of Christian orthodoxy; nor am I suggesting that either poet aims even tangentially at the moral instruction of readers. What I do suggest, however, is that the tension between iconic and realistic representations of bodies in the work of both writers suggests that material embodiment is a requisite for moral or ethical – that is, humane – behavior, particularly as that behavior is conceived of as sympathetic connection.

Although the work of both writers demonstrates a similar tension related to the representation of bodies – particularly, as in the case of the poems I discuss in this chapter, the bodies of women – the methods each uses differ markedly, and the emphasis falls differently for each. Rossetti's poems suggest the enormous temptation to conceive of women (who are so often the subjects of his poems) as vaguely embodied abstractions, while Swinburne's speakers fear that the women they address are so abstracted, so iconic and disembodied, that they are permanently beyond the reach of the speakers' touch.

Both poets insist on the necessity of material embodiment for any kind of sympathetic connection between the speaker and the object in the poem, but both poets problematize any ready alignment between connection and embodiment by insisting upon abstraction as well as upon materiality.

Interestingly, both poets explicitly and strongly denied any association with materialism. As Gowan Dawson has shown, materialism in the 1860s and 1870s meant not simply an appreciation of sensory experience of the material world but instead

³ For these poets, physical connection forms the foundation for ethics: without somatic experience, and without material contact between individuals, no humane connection – that is, no sympathy – is possible.

strongly implied atheism.⁴ Robert Buchanan does not explicitly connect Rossetti's poems to scientific (and consequently atheist) materialism, but the intellectual climate in which both Buchanan's review and Rossetti's (and Swinburne's) poetry were published makes clear the connections between Buchanan's fear of "fleshliness" and the condemnations of scientific materialism in the periodical press of the 1870s. An anonymous letter to the *Quarterly Review* alleged of the "fleshly poets" that "Atheism, which is quietly avowed by one, is passionately professed by another, not as the supplanter of superstition, but as the rival of Christianity."⁵ To William Michael Rossetti, it seemed clear that Swinburne was the one who "passionately professed" atheism, but he was deeply concerned to prove that his brother was not the one who "quietly avowed" it, suggesting that allegations of atheism were of much more significant concern than any imputations of immorality. Dante Gabriel Rossetti takes careful issue in "The Stealthy School of Criticism" with what he clearly feels is the most important allegation of Buchanan's "Fleshly School" attack, that Rossetti values the body more than the soul: "[H]ere all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared – somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably – to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times" (SSC 793).⁶ He admits to treating his artistic

⁴ Gowan Dawson, "Intrinsic Earthliness: Science, Materialism, and the Fleshly School of Poetry" (*Victorian Poetry* 41.1 [2003], 113-29), claims that "Rossetti's critics meant not merely an artistic concern with the material aspects of objects, but the deliberate prioritization of the physical body over the spiritual soul, which could lead only to an atheistic unbelief" (114).

⁵ [William John Courthope], "The Latest Development of Literary Poetry" (*Quarterly Review* 132 [1872], 63; quoted in Dawson, "Intrinsic Earthliness," 117).

⁶ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Stealthy School of Criticism" (*The Athanaeum* [July-December 1871], 792-94 [in McGann, ed., *The Rossetti Archive*]; retrieved 7 Feb. 2007 from <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org>>. Subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically as SSC.

subjects with a broader view than some readers might; “But to state that I do so to the ignoring or overshadowing of spiritual beauty, is an absolute falsehood, impossible to be put forward except in the indulgence of prejudice or rancour” (SSC 793).

Swinburne, in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, discusses his poetry explicitly in terms of spirit rather than form: claiming that Catullus’s translation of Sappho’s Ode to Anactoria “is colourless and bloodless,” Swinburne says that, instead of repeating such a mistaken translation, he “tried instead to reproduce in a diluted and dilated form the spirit of a poem which could not be reproduced in the body” (SR 20).⁷ “I have striven,” Swinburne continues, “to cast my spirit into the mould of [Sappho’s], to express and represent not the poem but the poet” (SR 21). Even more significantly, Swinburne’s strongest objection to Christianity was its inherent materialism: in his review of Victor Hugo’s *Religions et Religion*, Swinburne praised it as “an impeachment of all mere materialism” and “the militant materialism of Papists and Positivists both.” He calls Christianity “the worst . . . surviving form of materialism in the whole world,” saying that “it is implicitly impossible to be a Christian without being a materialist.”⁸ Explicitly, then, Swinburne appears oddly hostile to the kind of philosophical materialism one might expect, given the intensely material images of his poetry.

Yet Swinburne’s own reputed sympathy with the material world provides an index to the importance with which he invested sensation and sensuous experience, often suggesting that intense sensation offered a means to transcendence. Swinburne wrote

⁷ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (in Clyde K. Hyder, *Swinburne Replies: Notes on Poems and Review, Under the Microscope, and Dedicatory Epistle* [Syracuse: Syracuse U P, 1966]). Subsequent references to this collection will be noted parenthetically as SR.

⁸ Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Victor Hugo” (1875); quoted in Margot K. Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s U P, 1990), 43.

about his experience of swimming in the ocean as a boy in terms of intense sensory pleasure and the transcendence of individual boundaries:

I ran like a boy, tore off my clothes, and hurled myself into the water. And it was but for a few minutes – but I was in Heaven! The whole sea was literally golden as well as green – it was liquid and living sunlight in which one lived and moved and had one’s being. And to feel that in deep water is to feel – as long as one is swimming out, if only for a minute or two – as if one was in another world of life, and one far more glorious than even Dante ever dreamed of in his Paradise.⁹

As Rikky Rooksby notes, “The references to Paradise and Heaven go beyond the mere expression of pleasure and enthusiasm. For Swinburne, the encounter with the sea seems a recovery of a unity of being and connection with life.”¹⁰ To feel, for Swinburne, is an absolute good; to feel excessively is even better. Swinburne’s desire for transcendence connects his deep sensual appreciation for the material world and its sensations with his simultaneous desire to exceed the bounds of the material. Swinburne wrote of Tannhäuser’s choice of Venus in terms that suggest an inherent value in extremity: “Light loves and harmless errors must not touch the elect of heaven or hell” (SR 27). That one could be “elect” of hell in the same way one could be elect of heaven suggests that to be truly damned is as sublime as to be truly holy. It is the crossing of accepted boundaries, the transgression of the most important laws, that allows the sublime transcendence Swinburne seems most to value.¹¹ Robert Louis Stevenson appears to

⁹ Cecil Y. Lang (ed.), *The Swinburne Letters* (6 vols.; New Haven: Yale U P, 1959-62), 5:275; quoted in Rikky Rooksby, “The Algernonicon, or Thirteen Ways of Looking at *Tristram of Lyonesse*” (Rikky Rooksby and Nicholas Shrimpton [eds.], *The Whole Music of Passion: New Essays on Swinburne* [Aldershot: Scolar P, 1993]), 76-77.

¹⁰ Rooksby, “The Algernonicon,” 77.

¹¹ Swinburne seems implicitly to equate transgress – to cross boundaries or laws in ways that are dangerous or illicit – with transcend – to climb over hurdles. The horizontal movement of transgression leads, for Swinburne, to the vertical movement of transcendence.

have come to this conclusion about Swinburne's poetry when he asserted that, in Swinburne's poems, the hypermaterial world exists to demonstrate and initiate its own transcendence.¹²

As is clear just from Buchanan's reviews of Swinburne's and Rossetti's poetry, issues of sensation and materiality and their proper relationship to cognition are central to questions of both aesthetics and morality. Some contemporary reviewers explicitly appealed to the importance of reason in aesthetic experience as the foundation of their objections to the poetry. For example, John Morley objected strongly to what he perceived as Swinburne's attempt to "set up the pleasures of sense in the seat of the reason they have dethroned" (*SCH* 24),¹³ a reason that should be the final authority in matters moral and aesthetic. Similarly, an unsigned review of *Songs Before Sunrise* claims that, because of its disdain for reason, this poetry has the potential "not only [to] overturn all existing order, but in the end prove fatal to art, literature, and civilization itself" (*SCH* 138).¹⁴ "Sensationalism, at least in its extremest developments" – by which the reviewer seems to intend the ideas of Swinburne in particular along with those of the Pre-Raphaelite poets more generally – "springs from the assumption that the senses and their impulses are our highest sources of light and guidance, that reason and conscience are of no authority, that the moral and rational principles they supply – the highest

¹² "To read Swinburne long would either make you mad or moral . . . Swinburne's sensualism is too deep; it works its own cure." This 1868 statement by Stevenson is quoted in Clyde K. Hyder (ed.), *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 24, from George S. Helman, *The True Stevenson* (1925), 120. The ellipsis is in Hyder. Subsequent references to this collection will be noted parenthetically as *SCH*,

¹³ *Saturday Review* xxii (4 August 1866), 145-7 (in Hyder, *SCH*).

¹⁴ *Edinburgh Review* cxxxiv (July 1871), 94-99 (in Hyder, *SCH*).

regulative elements of our nature – may not only be disregarded with impunity, but are to be denounced as delusions, and rejected as mere hindrances to the life of nature. On such a theory reason is, of course, subordinated to sense, will to desire, while appetite and impulse are enthroned as lords of all” (*SCH* 134). Buchanan’s invocation of the “garish land beyond the region of pure thinking” (*SCH* 30)¹⁵ suggests that Swinburne’s poem is impure in at least two ways, both connected to thinking: first, that it involves a variety of thinking that is not in itself pure, wholesome, good, and moral; and second, that it combines thinking with other ways of knowing or judging, most noticeably through sensual bodily experience. By juxtaposing this criticism with the “transcendent purity” he identifies as “the glory of our modern poetry” (*SCH* 30), Buchanan insists on the cognitive element in poetic production and, presumably, in aesthetic judgment. The anxiety evident in these reviews suggests that aesthetic judgment, linked as these reviewers want to suggest it is to cognition and reflection, has tremendous social and moral implications.

Even where critics do not explicitly refer to the importance of reason in their responses to the poetry of Rossetti and Swinburne, they tend to use the terms of morality, materiality, and sensation in implicit relation or opposition to reason. In discussing Swinburne’s treatment of his poetic topics, one reviewer in the *Spectator* wrote that Swinburne “feasts on them [the overly sensual topics of his poems] with a greedy and cruel voracity, like a famished dog at raw meat” (*SR* 5).¹⁶ Another reviewer complained that “he lays on stroke after stroke of colour till the last obliterate the first, and we are

¹⁵ *Athanaeum*, 4 August 1866 (in Hyder, *SCH*).

¹⁶ “Mr. Swinburne on his Critics,” *The Spectator* (3 Nov. 1866), 1229 (in Hyder, *SR*).

bewildered among thick-coming sensations” (*SCH* 11).¹⁷ John Morley’s review is one of the most vivid and extreme in its hostility. Morley calls Swinburne “firmly and avowedly fixed in an attitude of revolt against the current notions of decency and dignity and social duty” (*SCH* 22); additionally, he says that Swinburne “grovel[s] down among the nameless shameless abominations which inspire him with such frenzied delight,” “attempt[s] to glorify all the bestial delights that the subtleness of Greek depravity was able to contrive,” and exhibits “mixed vileness and childishness” in “depicting the spurious passion of a putrescent imagination, the unnamed lusts of sated wantons, as if they were the crown of character and their enjoyment the great glory of human life” (*SCH* 23-24). Cruel, voracious, shameless, bestial, depraved, vile, putrescent, wanton: all of these terms insist upon the immorality associated with bodily and material existence, while some highlight the degeneracy and rot associated with sensuality and sensuousness. Based on these reviews, the best that can be said of Swinburne and the other “sensationalists” is that, where they fail to repulse, they “bewilder” the reader through excessive and misplaced sensation. Clearly, then, Buchanan’s “Fleshly School” is far from unusual in the associations it makes between the emphasis on sensation within Rossetti’s poems and a failure of both aesthetic and moral content; most reviews of these poems suggest a continuing alignment between aesthetic value and an emphasis on reflection and idea over sensation or poetic form.¹⁸

¹⁷ Unsigned review, *Saturday Review* xix (6 May 1865), 540-42 (in Hyder, *SCH*).

¹⁸ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), discusses at length the responses of Buchanan and others to Pre-Raphaelite poetry, noting that Buchanan “adopted one of the tactics of reactionary rage, describing as *immoral* what is *politically* complex and unsettling” (386). “Buchanan’s complaint is simple: these poets are prurient, erotic poets exposing their morbid and self-indulgent sexuality and preaching an adolescent transgressiveness which is ultimately trivial because it is out to sensationalise and shock. . . . Effeminacy, schoolboy snickers and tumidly ineffectual blasphemy,

I want to use the terms of this debate to discuss the poetry of Rossetti and Swinburne, but I want to do so neither to confirm that these poets seek to overthrow reason and morality by enthroning an all-encompassing sensation, nor to refute these charges by proving that the poets actually prefer morality and reason to materiality and sensation. Instead, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, I argue that Rossetti and Swinburne make use of far more complicated versions of both materiality and morality than can be contained either in a simple opposition of morality and reason against debasement and materiality or in a smooth and easy integration of the two sets of terms. Both poets saturate their poems with images that depict the sensations of the poetic subjects within the poems; in addition, through the images they contain as well as by means of their formal characteristics such as meter, rhyme, and textuality, they encourage within the reader sometimes acute somatic responses as well as an unavoidable awareness of his or her own embodiedness. At the same time, though, both poets present images that suggest iconicity rather than specificity, which both enacts and encourages distance rather than immediacy between poem and reader. In this section, I want to look closely at four poems, all of which were accused by contemporary critics of debasement and degeneracy along with too great an investment in what could be termed variously sensation, sensuality, materiality, embodiment, and poetic form. The tension inherent in these poems between specificity (by which I mean to include issues of individuality, embodiment, materiality, and proximity) and iconicity (by which I mean to include disembodiment, spirituality, reason, and distance) reveals the uneasy but necessary

these defensive attempts to emasculate and trivialise the poetry suggest that the offensiveness of these poets is radically threatening, and genuinely 'dangerous to society'. Dangerous because of the clear imputation of homosexuality, dangerous because of political radicalism" (386).

connection each poet makes between materiality and morality. I do not attempt here any systematic, much less exhaustive, reading of individual works (or, obviously, the complete oeuvre of either writer); rather, I want only to gesture toward instances in which the conflict in representation suggests a larger philosophical conflict, between embodiment and disembodiment. To that end, I consider two poems by Rossetti and two by Swinburne – “The Blessed Damozel,” “Jenny,”¹⁹ “Laus Veneris,” and “Anactoria”²⁰ – as test cases for a different kind of sympathy predicated on material embodiment rather than imagination and on touch rather than vision.

Rossetti and Swinburne, Poetry and Materiality

Begun in 1847, revised repeatedly, and published several times²¹ over the next 34 years until its last publication in 1881, “The Blessed Damozel” was written as a sort of contemporary response to Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, which addresses, among other things, the relationship Beatrice, who is in heaven, has to her beloved on earth and to the creatures in heaven. Like several other poems, it is also connected to Rossetti’s wife, Elizabeth Siddal, who died from an overdose of laudanum in 1862 and with whom Rossetti buried a number of poems, retrieving them in 1869 by disinterring her grave in order to include

¹⁹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “The Blessed Damozel” and “Jenny” (in Jerome McGann [ed.], *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose* [New Haven: Yale U P, 2003]). All references to Rossetti’s poems are to this edition, and line numbers for both poems will be cited parenthetically.

²⁰ Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Laus Veneris” and “Anactoria” (in Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh [eds.], *Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose* [New Haven: Yale U P, 2004]). All references to Swinburne’s poems are to this edition, and line numbers for both poems will be cited parenthetically.

²¹ Jerome McGann identifies five versions of the poem: the first, composed between 1846 and 1847 and never published, which has been lost; one published in *Germ* in 1850; another revision from 1855; a version printed in *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in 1856; and the version published in 1870 in *Poems*, although this version was revised slightly for republication in the new edition of *Poems* in 1881. See McGann’s “Notes to the Text” in his *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, 377.

them in 1870's *Poems*. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that "The Blessed Damozel" both contains and embodies a series of unresolved conflicts related to love, desire, embodiment, and spirituality, rapidly oscillating between images of the beloved as abstracted, iconic figure and images of her as thoroughly individual woman.

The damozel's namelessness establishes her status as abstraction, a status that is reinforced by her other iconic characteristics. Her eyes are "deeper than the depths / Of waters stilled at even" (ll. 3-4), a depth that is echoed four stanzas later in the description of the gulf lying under the ramparts of heaven, "By God built over the sheer depth / The which is Space begun" (ll. 27-28). Her eyes are deeper, less fathomable than still water; likewise, the depth by which heaven is separated from the created world cannot be measured because it exceeds any available terms of spatiality. Instead, both depths come to signify ultimate rather than literal distance, unbridgeable separation in kind rather than relative farness or nearness. The three lilies that she carries and the seven stars in her hair (ll. 5-6) reinforce her impersonal, iconic power. The numbers three and seven traditionally signify completeness as well as otherworldly power; further, the lilies connect her to the resurrection of Christ, while the seven stars suggest both Joseph's dream about his brothers and the infinity of the universe (both of which, consequently, connect this poem to conceptions of completeness that are both religious/traditional and scientific/contemporary). Finally, through these items she is connected iconically both to the earth (through the lilies) and to the sky (through the stars), suggesting a diffused and ideal presence rather than any sense of actual locatedness. When she speaks, it is "as when / The stars sang in their spheres" (ll. 53-54), with a voice "like the voice the stars / Had when they sang together" (ll. 59-60). These references to the music of the spheres

invoke the concept of perfect harmony and balance within the universe and among its various parts,²² suggesting again that the damozel speaks with a voice that is perfection itself.

Further, she is surrounded by stasis: her look (l. 16), her position leaning against the bar (l. 44), the weather (l. 58) are all unchanging and still; Heaven, too, is a “fixed place” (l. 49), peopled by other abstractions. She is only one of many of “God’s choristers” (l. 14), and in the presence of God she sees “the clear-ranged unnumbered heads” (l. 123) of the souls kneeling in worship, suggesting a generalized presence rather than individuality. The “five handmaidens, whose names / Are five sweet symphonies” (ll. 105-106), sit “Circlewise” (l. 109); the circle, an image of a closed circuit of fixedness, stability, and absence of change, is repeated in the garlands the handmaidens wear around their foreheads (l. 110) and in the “circling charm” of heaven itself (l. 44), as well as in the figure of the spheres that the stars make. Images from Christian iconography underscore both the abstraction and the stasis of the damozel’s heaven. She imagines lying with her lover, when he joins her in heaven, beneath “that living mystic tree” (l. 86), within which “the Dove” (l. 87) is imagined to dwell. The dove is a traditional symbol for the Holy Spirit, while the tree suggests multiple possibilities from Jewish and Christian iconography: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of

²² The concept of the “music of the spheres” originated with the Pythagoreans, who imagined the universe to be constructed according to the same principles that governed music; the individual components of the solar system each produced a unique sound which, when combined, produced perfectly harmonized music. Later, Kepler wrote in *Harmonice Munde* (1619) of his wish “to erect the magnificent edifice of the harmonic system of the musical scale . . . as God, the Creator Himself, has expressed it in harmonizing the heavenly motions” (Johannes Kepler, *Harmonice Munde* [quoted in Paul Calter, *Squaring the Circle: Geometry in Art and Architecture* (Dartmouth: Key College Publishing, 2006; <<http://math.dartmouth.edu/~matc/eBookshelf/art/SquaringCircle.html>>)).

life, the human genealogy of Jesus, the cross.²³ Together, they will approach “the deep wells of light” (l. 76) in the presence of God, and see the “shrine / Occult, withheld, untrod” (ll. 79-80). In both cases, it is the hiddenness and unknowability that is emphasized;²⁴ like the gulf between heaven and earth, the “deep wells” that emit the light cannot be measured, and the shrine is hidden from the uninitiated.

In the midst of this relentless deindividualization, though, other images creep in that establish a competing sense of the damozel as a particular individual: her hair is “yellow like ripe corn” (l. 12) rather than the gold it could be, and in the speaker’s imagination it “fell all about [his] face” (l. 22) when she leaned over him. As has been remarked repeatedly, she warms the bar she leans on, in spite of the fact that she presumably lacks a living, material body. For a spirit, she is decidedly material, and it is in those material terms that her lover experiences her, even in his imagination, as well:

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird’s song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be harkened? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?) (ll. 61-66)

The bird’s song and the echoing stair suggest actual sounds one might hear in moving through any particular day in one’s life. In addition, these sounds suggest not only

²³ Interestingly, the Book of Jeremiah includes multiple references to an unfaithful Israel lying beneath a tree’s spreading branches as a prostitute: “‘Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you!’” Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute” (Jeremiah 2:20); “‘During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there’” (Jeremiah 3:6); “‘Only acknowledge your guilt – you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 3:13).

²⁴ In addition to meaning generally hidden or mysterious, “occult” also suggests that something is beyond comprehension through reason as well as undetectable to the senses. See “Occult” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

specificity and particularity but physical contact: bells ring when the tongue strikes the inside of the bell, and footsteps echo through the contact of a foot with a stair. Sound itself produces and is produced through contact with the eardrum of the listener. Not only, then, do these sounds suggest actual presence; they also insist upon materiality and contact.

Both the poem's speaker and the damozel imagine their reunion in Heaven to include physical contact. She will "take his hand and go with him" (l. 75); they will lie together in the shade (l. 85); she will comfort him when he is afraid by "lay[ing] my cheek / To his" (ll. 116-17); Mary herself will lead them "hand in hand" (l. 121) into the presence of God. Even more significantly, both imagine their earthly love as relevant to an eternity in heaven. The damozel will "tell about our love, / Not once abashed or weak: / And the dear Mother will approve / My pride, and let me speak" (ll. 117-20); and she will ask Christ himself to allow them pleasure in each other: "Only to live as once on earth / With Love, -- only to be, / As then awhile, for ever now / Together, I and he" (ll. 129-32). Her lover, meanwhile, imagines their love as his only chance to experience heaven: "Yea, one wast thou with me / That once of old. But shall God lift / To endless unity / The soul whose likeness with thy soul / Was but its love for thee?" (ll. 98-102). This doubt suggests both that he believes his heaven has passed because she has died and that if he were to experience heaven after death it would only be because his love for her during their lives had made him enough like her to justify paradise. This is echoed implicitly by the damozel's apparent inability to enter the presence of God without her earthly lover: she waits on the outer edge of heaven, watching spirits move past her as they enter, and prays continually for him to join her so that they can go together and

“bathe there in God’s sight” (l. 78). Love, capitalized as it is for the damozel, is a powerful force both material and spiritual, but it is invoked in this poem exclusively as an experience dependent on, and evocative of, embodiment.

Barriers and boundaries stand among the most significant categories of material existence in this poem. There is “the gold bar of Heaven” (l. 2), “the rampart of God’s house” (l. 25), the “void” or “gulf” (ll. 35, 52), and the “golden barriers” (l. 142), all of which separate heaven from earth and the damozel from heaven. People are bounded as well: the handmaidens’ locks are “bound” and the garlands around their foreheads, which are indeed beautiful adornments, are simultaneously a kind of binding. Even the “circling charm” of heaven acts as a boundary, albeit a nonmaterial one that seems to act subtly (through a charm, perhaps a kind of enchantment) rather than overtly. These bounds seem meant to be breached, generally through particularly distinct material means. The changing light of day and night materially affect the vacuum of space outside of heaven: “Beneath, the tides of day and night / With flame and darkness ridge / The void” (ll. 33-34). In this conception, light and darkness extend beyond the purely visual to give tactility and texture to emptiness. Similarly, when the damozel’s “gaze . . . strove / Within the gulf to pierce / Its path” (ll. 51-53) and when her voice “spoke through the still weather” (l. 58), these non-material attributes (gaze and voice) penetrate and disrupt the stasis, as well as the material boundaries, that surrounds her.

What interests me most in this poem, however, are those images that can comfortably be relegated to neither category but rather present inherent conflicts between specificity and iconicity. The first, and arguably the most complex, is the image of the damozel’s robe, “ungirt from clasp to hem” (l. 7). Functioning as a material covering that

nonetheless reveals as much as it conceals, the robe can also be read as a figure for the materiality of the body that both conceals and reveals the non-material soul.²⁵ In this reading, the robe is both a material object in itself (a piece of clothing) and a textual symbol that stands in for a different material object (the damozel's body), which itself is the visible representation of a non-material essence (her soul). Materiality in this reading is always suggestive of something other than itself (as Hegel argues sensuous objects should always be), ultimately a non-material or spiritual essence. It is also always indefinite and incomplete, not quite satisfactory in its work. The robe is "ungirt," suggesting that it neither fully covers nor fully reveals the thing it stands for but only partially represents it; a viewer might catch glimpses of her body under the robe, but she is clearly neither fully nude nor even particularly exposed. Consequently, though, her body is only incompletely removed from sight, which means that the robe's representative function is as partial as is its concealing function. If a symbol works only insofar as it replaces the object or concept it is supposed to represent, the incompletely replaced body of the damozel compromises the representational efficacy of this particular symbol. This very material image seems to suggest as much about the inutility of symbolic representation as it does about the imagined materiality of human relationships and of the afterlife.

Other images present a less complicated but nonetheless shifting conception of materiality that works effectively to disrupt the opposition between material and nonmaterial. When the damozel and her lover approach the "Occult, withheld, untrod"

²⁵ Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, makes this point extraordinarily clearly, and ultimately finds that materiality for Rossetti is unfulfilling and unsatisfactory.

shrine, they will “see” their “old prayers, granted, melt / Each like a little cloud” (ll. 80, 82-3). In this conception, a prayer, which at its most material exists only as spoken language and might just as often exist only in thought, takes visible form; it is as if vapor, by definition invisible, were to condense into a cloud and become visible. Yet this visible embodiment of a non-material substance – prayer – dissipates as soon as it is granted, at the very moment it might seem to gain material existence. The poem’s end similarly associates prayer with embodiment and disembodiment simultaneously:

She gazed and listened and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild, --
‘All this is when he comes.’ She ceased.
The light thrilled towards her, fill’d
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes prayed, and she smil’d.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.) (ll. 133-144)

Prayer here is silent, accomplished through her eyes rather than through uttered words or even verbal thoughts. Her hopeful prayer seems both to be prompted by and to provoke movement: the light that “thrilled towards her” and the “angels in strong level flight.” These phrases suggest both movement and materiality, as well as a version of the barrier breaching I noted above. The light has substance and agency, and the angels, presumably the spirits of the newly dead moving toward heaven, are “strong” and “level” in their approach. When the angels pass by, however, without her lover in their midst, specificity and material substance are replaced by distance and “vague” generality: we return here to the “distant spheres” of earlier, more iconic passages.

The poem's formal attributes echo the representations of materiality and non-materiality, and they also underscore the tensions between the two modes. Written in lines of alternating tetrameter and trimeter, with the second, fourth, and sixth line of each stanza rhyming, the poem is in many ways an example of traditional ballad form. The fact that each stanza is comprised of six rather than either four or eight lines means that the stanzas do not entirely conform to the ballad form but instead either extend the ballad stanza an extra seven beats or end it seven beats early. As is typical with ballads, phrasing tends to coincide with line length, with most line pairs ending in periods, semi-colons, or other similar punctuation indicators. Stanza seven is typical of this form:

Around her, lovers, newly met
 'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
 Spoke evermore among themselves
 Their heart-remembered names;
 And the souls mounting up to God
 Went by her like thin flames. (ll. 37-42).

The rhymes on the *b* lines are clean, and the phrases neatly and naturally coincide with the lines, so that the lines pair easily. The iambic meter is regular and unstrained, with the possible exception of a stress on "the" in line 41.²⁶

The metrical regularity of this stanza reinforces its content, which rests cleanly in the register of disembodiment and iconicity.²⁷ The formal regularity of this stanza

²⁶ Although the line can be read without stressing "the," it is stressed if the line is read with strict iambic stressing: "And thé souls móunting úp to Gód."

²⁷ George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody, from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (3 vols.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), claims that "There is nothing schematically very singular in the metre of this great poem, which is merely common measure prolonged to a six with an extra couplet, the eights being not rhymed at all, the sixes rhymed together . . . But I do not know that it can be said, merely as a metre, to carry with it, or even to suggest, much other definite property or endowment" (3:310). While Saintsbury accurately notes the apparent simplicity of Rossetti's stanza structure, I suggest that the more subtle variations in individual stanzas coincide with thematic intrusions of materiality in such a way as to reinforce the disruption that materiality poses for the poem and for Rossetti.

contrasts sharply with other stanzas that present images of specificity or materiality, both suggesting and instantiating the potential for disruption that materiality seems to encompass. When the damozel's lover first speaks,²⁸ he does so using strongly tactile images presented in phrases that disrupt the regularity of the poem's usual stanza structure.

(To one, it is ten years of years.
. . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me – her hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.) (ll. 19-24)

The first two lines seem regular enough in meter and rhyme, although the period ending the first line interrupts what is usually a de facto heptasyllabic phrase and emphasizes instead separation rather than connection between the lines. However, even that compromised regularity disintegrates with the third line. Instead of running the length of the third and fourth lines, this phrase is broken in the middle of the third line, causing the subsequent semantic unit to run unequally over the two lines. The semantic and grammatical break in line three also effectively reverses the syllabic order, breaking the iambic heptameter into two segments of three and four stressed beats respectively instead of four and three. The ellipses similarly break up the stanzaic structure, even though they do not replace missing syllables or directly alter the meter. They, like the dash and the colon, both suggest fragmentation in the subject matter and enact fragmentation on the level of textuality. Instead of three smoothly running phrases of seven syllables each, this

²⁸ Each of these parenthetical reflections by the damozel's lover is marked by similar disruptions in poetic form. I have chosen to discuss this first instance at some length, but similar attention to stanzas 11 and 17 would reveal equivalent changes to meter, line, and phrasing.

stanza presents six distinct phrases, each of which demands separation from the others. And line 23 is comprised of two dependent clauses rather than a complete sentence: comprised of a rejection (“Nothing.”) and a sad recognition of truth (“The autumn-fall of leaves.”), the line both resists syntactic integration and insists upon the actual materiality of falling leaves in place of the dreamed of contact with the damozel’s hair.

Line enjambment functions similarly in other stanzas to highlight the specificity and materiality of particular images against the otherwise orderly metrical regularity. The crossing of barriers seems particularly connected to disruptions in metrical or grammatical regularity:

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres. (ll. 49-54)

In this case, the enjambment takes place between multiple lines: the second and third, the third and fourth, and the fourth and fifth. The effect is to embed two lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter (i.e., blank verse) in the middle of the stanza: “Time like a pulse shake fierce through all the worlds” and “Her gaze still strove within the gulf to pierce.” The longer semantic units – “From the fixed place of Heaven she saw / Time like a pulse shake fierce / Through all the worlds” and “Her gaze still strove / Within the gulf to pierce / Its path” – have the effect of turning a comfortable, song-like poem into something far more serious. If the ballad form is associated with collectivity, tradition, and simplicity, blank verse is suggestive of a Romantic poetics that emphasizes the introspective and the individual. The next stanza, in which the damozel’s voice pierces

the “still weather” of heaven, contains similar instances of extended phrasing that disrupts the easiness and regularity of the ballad stanza; because of their very irregularity, these lines and stanzas call attention to themselves, thereby giving textual form to specificity in the midst of generality, and calling attention to the value – conflicted as it clearly is – that this poem places on the individual and particular in place of the generic.²⁹

In “The Blessed Damozel,” we get multiple perspectives on the situation and the issues at stake, which serves to highlight the tensions between materiality and nonmateriality, between specificity and generality. In “Jenny,” the only perspective presented is that of the “young and thoughtful man of the world,” as Rossetti describes the speaker. The object of particularly vehement critical objection, “Jenny” is Rossetti’s prime example of the “inner standing point” (SSC 793), an artistic principle he uses to avoid objectivity and to achieve a closeness of perspective – a kind of sympathy, if you will – with his poetic characters: “Nor did I omit to consider how far a treatment from without [i.e., from a disinterested, neutral perspective] might here be possible. But the motive powers of art reverse the requirement of science, and demand first of all an *inner* standing-point. The heart of such a mystery as this must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds; and the beauty and pity, the self-questionings and all-

²⁹ While Rossetti’s poem suggests a deep uneasiness about the efficacy (and even, perhaps, the ultimate desirability) of the specific and the material, I argue that it depicts a world in which human connection – sympathy – is possible *only* through materiality. Materiality and somatic sensation may not always lead to sympathetic, human connection, but without them such connection is simply impossible. Thus materiality forms the basis of the poem’s ethical system, even if that ethical system is presented as ultimately (in this case) ineffectual. Isobel Armstrong’s immensely useful reading of the poem identifies the tensions and unexpected reversals of material and idea that Rossetti presents: “Rossetti’s poem rests on a simple yet bold reversal. Sensuous longing and physical desire are placed in heaven, itself a physical barrier, a golden bar or rampart, a bar which the bosom of the Damozel can make warm with her flesh . . . [It] meditates the notion of presence and the symbol which takes the transcendent mystical body to be represented by the outward sign. . . . The poem is asking in what way we perceive the mystical body through the physical body and how we invest the material with significance” (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 246-47).

questionings which it brings with it, can come with full force only from the mouth of one alive to its whole appeal, such as the speaker put forward in the poem . . .” (SSC 793). In representing only the young man’s view point, “Jenny” highlights the speaker’s internal conflicts, all of which center on the tension between seeing Jenny as a generic prostitute and seeing her as a particular, individual person. If “The Blessed Damozel” insists upon materiality and specificity as means of connection and communion, but ultimately deems both impossible, “Jenny” highlights the temptation of the speaker (and of ourselves as readers by implication) to operate exclusively in the register of iconicity and concept instead of particularity. Like “The Blessed Damozel,” “Jenny” presents this ethical tension through repeated movement between images that suggest abstraction and those that suggest specificity.

At first, these competing representations can be disentangled. For example, the speaker recognizes her weariness, that she “seem[s] too tired to get to bed” (l. 36), and he believes her, probably accurately, to be “thankful for a little rest” (l. 67). As she rests her head on his knee, he notices her “wealth of loosened hair, / Your silk ungirdled and unlac’d” (ll. 47-48); when he notices that she has fallen asleep, he seems to see her as she really is:

Why, Jenny, you’re asleep at last! –
Asleep, poor Jenny, hard and fast, –
So young and soft and tired; so fair,
With chin thus nestled in your hair,
Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue . . . (ll. 171-175)

In this passage, Jenny exists for him simply as a young woman, “So young and soft and tired.” The “eyelids almost blue” are startlingly real, here, perhaps the most real and least iconic detail of her appearance, even though the reason for the blueness remains unclear:

it could be just the blueness of a vein visible through the thin skin, or it could be mark of exhaustion, the equivalent of dark circles under her eyes.

However, these images of Jenny as an individual are outnumbered and outweighed by other, more frequent images of a generic prostitute. The first image, for example, is a thoroughly iconic one, of “Lazy laughing languid Jenny” (l. 1), the prostitute who is happy in her profession and enjoys the company of her customers, who is “Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea” (l. 2): equally fond, that is, of what she does and of what she earns, and consistently able to play her part as a superficial, disingenuous actress, one who is always ready for a good time. This Jenny is “fair Jenny mine, the thoughtless queen / Of kisses” (ll. 7-8), “Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair / Is countless gold incomparable” (ll. 10-11). The speaker imagines her first as a “Fresh flower, scarce touched with signs that tell / Of Love’s exuberant hotbed” (ll. 12-13), suggesting that she is a vivacious young woman who remains untainted by her work, for whom he need feel no particular compassion since (being both “laughing” and “languid”) she “exuberant[ly]” enjoys what she does; she is also “Poor flower left torn since yesterday / Until to-morrow leave you bare” (ll. 14-15), identifying her as a fallen woman who has been irreparably degraded. In both cases, she is representative rather than individual, and the images are iconic rather than particular. Further, the construction of the images themselves suggests distance from immediate material reality: whether phrased as metaphors (Jenny *is* “the thoughtless queen / Of kisses”) or as similes (her eyes “are *as* blue skies”), the descriptions of Jenny actually point to something that she is not, rather than provide particular and material descriptions of what she is. These descriptions work through comparison to something outside Jenny, suggesting by their

very structure (as well as by their content) that the speaker is invested from the beginning in seeing Jenny as representative rather than individual.

While the initial stanzas present images that seem either iconic or particular, as the poem progresses images of Jenny oscillate wildly between iconic abstraction and individualized materiality, until the representations pile up in tangled chains. While observing Jenny as she sleeps, the speaker imagines Jenny in a series of images that shift her from iconic to individual and back again in a whirl of representations:

Fair shines the gilded aureole
In which our highest painters place
Some living woman's simple face.
And the stilled features thus descried
As Jenny's long throat droops aside, --
The shadows where the cheeks are thin,
And pure wide curve from ear to chin, --
With Raffael's or De Vinci's hand
To show them to men's souls, might stand,
Whole ages long, the whole world through,
For preachings of what God can do. (ll. 230-240)

In this rapid series of descriptions, Jenny's blond hair becomes a "gilded aureole," a golden halo, a stylized frame for "Some living woman's simple face," making her both the iconic halo and the "simple face" it surrounds; Jenny's cheeks are thin enough to be in shadow, while her face as a whole is shaped with the "pure wide curve" of a Renaissance artist's rendition; taken altogether, her face stands as evidence of the perfection of God's creation. She is the model for the painting; she is also the painting itself, as well as its frame. She is the image, and she frames and contains the image. She is also, in this set of images, an art object waiting for the interpretive gaze of a critic.

This pattern of comparison highlights Jenny's role in the poem, and for the young man, as the emptied object waiting for interpretation, a role that is underscored by the

speaker's repeated likening of Jenny to a book. Although he has left his room of books behind in order to have some fun – "I vowed that since my brain / And eyes of dancing seemed so fain, / My feet should have some dancing too" (ll. 30-32) – it is clear from his first description of books that they and Jenny are interchangeable. For the speaker, books "hold fast, forsooth, / So many captive hours of youth, -- / The hours they thieve from day and night / To make one's cherished work come right, / And leave it wrong for all their theft" (ll. 24-28). Jenny clearly represents an escape for the speaker from that world of books, but, like those books, the temptations Jenny provides "thieve [hours] from night and day" and leave nothing but dissatisfaction after they end. The comparison soon becomes explicit: "You know not what a book you seem, / Half-read by lightning in a dream!" (ll. 51-52). Her mind, unused to reflection or intellectual activity, is like "a volume seldom read" which "Being opened halfway shuts again" (l. 138-39): "So might the pages of her brain / be parted at such words, and thence / Close back upon the dusty sense" (ll. 140-142), which seems reason enough for the speaker not to speak his thoughts of her aloud. Finally, she is a flower pressed between pages, "a rose shut in a book / In which pure women may not look, / For its base pages claim control / To crush the flower within the soul" (ll. 253-56). The book in which she is contained, by which she is trapped and crushed, is one off-limits to pure women: it is "base" and "vile" (l. 259), and the rose between its pages is "Puddled with shameful knowledge" (l. 265).

This last image highlights the increasing levels of abstraction within the poem, a process which begins with the speaker's initial identification of Jenny as a generalized prostitute and which continues through her comparisons with a book. The increasing abstraction coincides paradoxically with an increasing degree of objectification: Jenny

becomes more of a thing and less of a person with every comparison. Like “The Blessed Damozel,” “Jenny” is also a poem about representations and layers. As the rose pressed between the pages of the book, Jenny is imagined as a non-sentient object, a flower, which stands for her now-faded virtue, and contained within text. Jenny as a complicated human individual is reduced to one characteristic, her virtue; that virtue is further abstracted by being imagined as something it is not, a rose; the rose is literally transformed – crushed – in order to contain the “shameful knowledge” the rose/virtue/Jenny possesses; the containing object, as a book, is the embodiment of representation, text. The speaker is conscious of his growing abstraction:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
The woman almost fades from view.
A cipher of man’s changeless sum
Of lust, past, present, and to come,
Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
To challenge from the scornful sphinx. (ll. 276-81)

As the speaker recognizes, Jenny is no longer a woman but only the evacuated shell that reflects the lust of the men who pay her, and finally simply a riddle. The sense of woman as mirror echoes the speaker’s earlier concern that, if Jenny thinks about him at all, she does so only in order to lure him to her (“Or inly is each grace revolved / To fit me with a lure?” [ll. 62-63]). Even this level of attention to Jenny fades in the next stanza, however, when the speaker, spurred by his thoughts about the role of lust, imagines lust as the mythical toad within a stone, which remains motionless within its “charmed” (l. 288) circle, “deaf, blind, alone” (l. 291). In these stanzas, the poem, guided by the speaker’s attention, moves from a) attention to Jenny, to her simultaneous abstraction and objectification as b) a rose closed in a book, to her reduction first to c) a shell filled with

the desires of men and then to d) a riddle, to a reflection about e) the place of lust in the world, represented by f) a toad enclosed within g) a stone. We are now fully seven layers away from Jenny, the ostensible subject of the poem. Other aspects of Jenny spur similar flights: her “lazy lily hand” (l. 97) leads to thoughts of “the lilies of the field” (l. 100), which in turn suggests death (a garden in winter, perhaps the lilies of a funeral) (ll. 111-13).

Even when the speaker does not entirely replace Jenny with either a symbolic representation or an abstract concept, his language and mode of address to her suggest anxiety and discomfort. The rapid shifts in both tone and imagery from kindness and specificity to cruelty and generality mirror the representations of her as an individual or as a prostitute. For example, the image of Jenny’s head on his knee is both tactile and material, and it also suggests kindness on his part and awareness of her as an individual; immediately, however, he returns her to the status of prostitute by wondering “Whose person or whose purse may be / The lodestar of your reverie?” (ll. 20-21). The implication here is that, as a prostitute, she will be thinking only of a customer, either in terms of his person or in terms of profit. Again, when he wonders what she thinks of him, he first considers that she might be curious about his personal story but then dismisses that notion deciding instead that she would focus only on constructing herself as a lure to him (ll. 59-63). Each time he begins to recognize his own complicity in Jenny’s situation, he reinforces her status as purchased thing rather than as human being. He imagines her wanting rest from “the hatefulness of man” (l. 83), “Who, having used you at his will, / Thrusts you aside, as when I dine / I serve the dishes and the wine” (ll. 86-88), but then immediately and dramatically changes both his tone and his focus:

“Well, handsome Jenny mine, sit up, / I’ve filled our glasses, let us sup, / And do not let me think of you, / Lest shame of yours suffice for two” (ll. 89-92). He imagines her dreaming of comfort, of a world in which “There roll no streets in glare and rain, / Nor flagrant man-swine whets his tusk; / But delicately sighs in musk / The homage of the dim boudoir” (ll. 348-51): a world, that is, that offers her respite from the dirt and degradation of her current life. He immediately undercuts this almost sympathetic imagination, though, by reminding her and himself that a highly paid courtesan is still a whore: “in the discounted dark / Her functions there are here are one” (ll. 359-60). When he leaves her in the morning, he puts a cushion under her head, as if concerned for her comfort as she sleeps, but then drops “golden coins” in her hair, suggesting that they might be “the subject of your dreams” (ll. 342, 341).

As the speaker leaves Jenny where she sleeps, he seems to consider his own mental representations of her:

And must I mock you to the last,
Ashamed of my own shame, -- aghast
Because some thoughts not born amiss
Rose at a poor fair face like this?” (ll. 380-383)

His reflection suggests that she fits most comfortably for him in the register of iconic representation: it does not seem to matter much whether she is “the thoughtless queen of kisses” or a streetwalker on whom “coach-wheels splash rebuke” (l. 147) as long as she stands in for something else besides herself, a young woman whose past is unknown and whose present and future are probably grim and largely impersonal.³⁰ Just as certainly,

³⁰ Rossetti’s young man of the world attempts to hold Jenny at a distance, avoiding the kind of ethical awareness of her individuality that I have discussed throughout this project. Jenny’s individuality is presented most clearly in depictions of her material specificity; the poetic speaker’s refusal to maintain his attention on the material details of her individuality underlies his ethical failure. As with “The Blessed

though, Jenny does not remain neatly contained within the bounds of such abstracted and iconic representation.³¹

If Rossetti invests his women with iconic significance, Swinburne brings his to the level of material individuality. Both “*Laus Veneris*” and “*Anactoria*” present a lover who wants desperately to maintain or to renew a relationship with a distant beloved. Among other similarities, both poems insist upon the violence of sexual attraction, and the pleasure of pain; both also equate life with materiality, and relationality with bodily marks and bodily sensation. Tannhäuser and Sappho desire to make their lovers *feel*, and to see their marks on their lovers’ bodies, but they fear that such bodily inscription, representative of the materiality and the significance of their desire, will be denied them. Through images of intense physiological pain, Swinburne suggests that such contact between material bodies is the necessary foundation for all relationality; this emphasis on the materiality of human life and interaction connects him to the kind of corporeal morality I presented at the beginning of this chapter. Swinburne’s morality is certainly unconventional – it is predicated, after all, on the pleasurable pain of sadomasochism – but it nevertheless depends upon and springs from an understanding of humans as fundamentally (and materially) connected.

“*Laus Veneris*” is based on the story of Tannhäuser, a medieval knight and poet.

Damozel,” somatic sensitivity and sensory experience in this poem do not necessarily lead to ethical sympathy, but without them sympathy, and consequently ethical behavior, is not possible.

³¹ I read “*Jenny*” as deeply conflicted about the relative status of material embodiment and soul or mind, but some other readers see it as unabashedly in favor of bodies. See, for example, Lise Rodgers, “The Book and the Flower: Rationality and Sensuality in ‘*Jenny*’ (in Harold Bloom [ed.], *Pre-Raphaelite Poets* [New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986], 21-35), who claims of “*Jenny*” that “In this poem, fleshly sensuality – the sensuality of the harlot – is a natural and desirable thing. Here the body is, in fact, greater than the soul: with all its fleshly needs and desires, it is the prime moral standard within the world of the poem. This is what Ruskin and Buchanan sensed, and what Rossetti knew” (33).

According to legend, he is ensnared by Venus but escapes and makes a pilgrimage to Rome, where he asks for a papal blessing. The Pope refuses absolution until such time as his staff grows blossoms, which will indicate that the period of Tannhäuser's penance is over; after hearing this verdict, Tannhäuser leaves Rome to begin his period of penance. Swinburne's poem takes place after the pilgrimage, when Tannhäuser returns to Venus's Hörselberg. Swinburne described his vision of the poem in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*: "To me it seemed that the tragedy began with the knight's return to Venus – began at the point where hitherto it had seemed to leave off. The immortal agony of a man lost after all repentance – cast down from fearful hope into fearless despair – believing in Christ and bound to Venus – desirous of penitential pain, and damned to joyless pleasure . . . The tragic touch of the story is this: that the knight who has renounced Christ believes in him; the lover who has embraced Venus disbelieves in her. Vainly and in despair would he make the best of that which is the worst – vainly remonstrate with God, and argue on the side he would fain desert" (*SR* 26). This irreconcilable conflict is evident not only in Tannhäuser's final decision to remain with Venus rather than attempt to return to the God he believes in, but also in the images of materiality that saturate the poem.

Tannhäuser yearns to leave a bodily mark on Venus to match the marks he knows she has inflicted on him. The poem opens with a sense of the impossibility of such material effect:

Asleep or waking is it? For her neck,
Kissed over close, wears yet a purple speck
Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out;
Soft, and stung softly – fairer for a fleck. (ll. 1-4)

At first, it appears that Tannhäuser has bruised her, left a “purple speck” on her neck, “kissed over close.” Immediately, however, he realizes that he cannot leave a bruise because, “though my lips shut sucking on the place, / There is no vein at work upon her face” (ll. 5-6). The suggestion here seems to be that she is unmoved by his attention, static in much the same sort of abstracted way that the damozel’s companions, the five handmaidens, appear insulated from any worldly sensations; the imagery, however, is of death. She is not simply unresponsive; she is lifeless, without blood or veins (although the literalness of the image of death is undercut shortly after: “Deep sleep has warmed her blood through all its ways” [l. 8]). Later, after chronicling the pain she can inflict upon him, he acknowledges again her impenetrability and his own inability to affect her, literally to scratch her surface: “Below her bosom, where a crushed grape stains / The white and blue, there my lips caught and clove / An hour since, and what mark of me remains?” (ll. 166-168). Like her neck, which “wears yet a purple speck,” her skin here is marked; he has had a material effect on her. Yet he knows that this mark, left only “An hour since,” is already disappearing. No wonder then that when he sees a “purple speck” still marking her throat, he wonders if he is awake or dreaming. Try as he might to mark his lover, whatever mark he makes will disappear almost immediately.

Venus suffers no such inability to mark her lovers, however. Her torture of the men who adore her is presented in inescapably physical images of pain:

Their blood runs round the roots of time like rain:
She casts them forth and gathers them again;
 With nerve and bone she weaves and multiplies
Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain.

Her little chambers drip with flower-like red,
Her girdles, and the chaplets of her head,

Her armlets and her anklets; with her feet
She tramples all that winepress of the dead.

. . . .

There is the knight Adonis that was slain;
With flesh and blood she chains him for a chain;
The body and the spirit in her ears
Cry, for her lips divide him vein by vein. (ll. 117-124, 133-136)

The men who are her lovers here are “the souls that were / Slain in the old time, having found her fair” (ll. 113-14): the ancient Greeks and Romans who lived before the advent of Christianity and so lived and died in her power. Nerve and bone are separated, and Adonis is divided “vein by vein” in a way that suggests the maximization of pain in terms of both duration and depth. The “roots of time” around which the lovers’ blood runs suggest an eternal cycle of torturous pleasure, bleeding, and return. Their blood is her adornment and decoration. She, like the “Love” in lines 36-48, is a weaver; her materials are the “nerve and bone” of the men themselves, and from them she “weaves and multiplies exceeding pleasure from extreme pain.” This image of Venus as a weaver echoes the earlier image of Love, “Crowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire, / . . . wan as foam blown up the salt burnt sands” (ll. 34-36), who stands “like one labouring at a loom” (l. 40):

The warp holds fast across; and every thread
That makes the woof up has dry specks of red;
Always the shuttle cleaves clean through, and he
Weaves with the hair of many a ruined head. (ll. 41-44)

Love, who seems in this description to be a sort of hybrid between Christ (the crown of “gilt thorns”) and Venus herself (given the reference to seafoam), weaves with the bloody hair of the dead; the shuttle itself acts like an executioner’s sword, “cleav[ing] clean

through” the loom as if it were one of the ruined heads whose hair he uses.

Tannhäuser alone of all her lovers remains alive: “Yea, all she slayeth; yea, every man save me; / Me, love, thy lover that must cleave to thee / Till the ending of the days and ways of earth . . .” (ll. 137-39). In spite of his recurrent prayers for death, he remains alive and will be so until time ends because of his rejection of Christ and his return to Venus. Yet his lament – “Yea, all she slayeth; yea, every man save me” – reads both as an acknowledgement of his chosen position, outside of the laws of nature that govern times of life and death, and as a desperate plea to Venus to do with him what she has done with past lovers. That is, Tannhäuser seems as tormented here by Venus’s lack of torture as he is by his inability to die, to leave existence behind. It is Tannhäuser who describes the “exceeding pleasure” that Venus weaves for those she tortures with her attentions; and Tannhäuser, not being tortured, may feel himself excluded from her love after he has sacrificed his soul for her. Although she “tramples all that winepress of the dead” (l. 124), extracting her victims’ blood and dividing them nerve from bone and vein from vein, she will not do this to him, and he keenly mourns that absence.

This is not to say that Venus has abandoned him; rather, it simply underscores the extent to which material, bodily contact – the paradigmatic essence of which, in this poem at least, is pain – is a necessary feature of relationality, of human connection. Tannhäuser is marked by his love for Venus, although in ways far less extreme – and consequently far less satisfying – than are the dead men in the passage above. Kissing her can “Leave [his] lips charred” (l. 170), which he counts as “a little bliss, / Brief bitter bliss . . . / . . . how sweet a thing it is” (ll. 170-72). Her proximity “make[s] / The very soul in all my senses ache” (ll. 89-90), and when “with blind lips” (l. 317) he reaches for

Venus, he finds himself strangled by her attentions: “. . . I . . . found / About my neck
your hands and hair enwound, / The hands that stifle and the hair that stings, / I felt them
fasten sharply without sound” (ll. 317-20). When he returns to Venus, after leaving
behind the Pope’s call to penitence, he experiences her attentions as painful pleasure that
models his future torments in hell:

Yea, she laid hold upon me, and her mouth
Clove unto mine as soul to body doth,
 And, laughing, made her lips luxurious;
. . .

And I forgot fear and all weary things,
All ended prayers and perished thanksgivings,
 Feeling her face with all her eager hair
Cleave to me, clinging as a fire that clings

To the body and to the raiment, burning them;
As after death I know that such-like flame
 Shall cleave to me for ever; yea, what care,
Albeit I burn then, having felt the same? (ll. 393-95, 401-408)

The pleasurable pains Venus offers make the torments of hell pale in comparison, and
Tannhäuser is willing to endure them later for the sake of the painful pleasure she gives
him now. This is the heart of Tannhäuser’s – and the poem’s – conflict: is it better to
choose the temporary but exquisite pleasure afforded by devotion to Venus in return for
eternal damnation, or to choose the “bitter love” that “is sorrow in all lands” (ll. 253-54)
– the faded, passionless love of Christianity – in exchange for eternity “High up in barren
heaven” (l. 413)? Tannhäuser chooses Venus and their love, saying that “there is no
better life than this”:

To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
 And afterward be cast out of God’s sight;
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in barren heaven before his face
As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
 Remembering love and all the dead delight,
And all that time was sweet with for a space? (ll. 409-16)

It is better, in Tannhäuser's estimation, to choose the torments of Venus's love than the "bitter love" of Christianity, brought to the world by "one that hath a plague-mark on his brows; / Dust and spilt blood do track him to his house / Down under earth; sweet smells of lip and cheek, / Like a sweet snake's breath made more poisonous / With chewing of some perfumed deadly grass, / Are shed all round his passage if he pass, / And their quenched savour leaves the whole soul weak" (ll. 257-63). The life promised by Christianity seems to Tannhäuser more like a living death, a gray and passionless life that makes "the whole soul weak."

Swinburne's own characterization of the poem – that its tragedy depends on the choice Tannhäuser makes with the full knowledge of its consequences, and that his despair stems from his allegiance to Venus in spite of his belief in Christ, thereby knowingly damning himself – suggests that Tannhäuser's praise of Venus is thoroughly ironic, and it is in this sense that a number of critics have read the poem.³² Other critics read the poem as a direct challenge to orthodox Christianity, as an anti-moral poem. Antony H. Harrison, for example, notes that "it is an erotically and aesthetically gratifying hell, rich with sensation . . . Tannhäuser's monologue thus serves what is, for Swinburne, a moral function: it initiates the reader into the ideal realm of erotic

³² See for example Jerome McGann's notes to the poem in McGann and Sligh (eds.), *Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, 476.

aestheticism and thus liberates him from repressive moral and religious values . . .”³³ I want to suggest, however, that Swinburne’s comment, and his poem, can be read otherwise. It is true that Tannhäuser recognizes the ultimate futility of his choosing Venus over Christ, and there is something of the tragic in this recognition. But his choice also insists upon the value (for Tannhäuser, for the poem, for Swinburne) of materiality and immediacy, of somatic experience, not simply in terms of pleasure but in terms of the potential for connection. I want to argue, that is, that Tannhäuser’s choice of intense sensation reveals the relationship of the body to morality – to the possibility for connection and communion – as much as it reveals an immediate desire for hedonistic pleasure.³⁴

Similarly, in “Anactoria,” Sappho wants to regain the kind of connection to Anactoria that she once had, represented here, in instance after instance, as the bodily marks left by torture:

I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein. (ll. 11-12)

Sappho’s bodily sensation (“my pain”) extends beyond her bodily boundaries and affects the body of her beloved (“Pains thee”). Further, the material composition of Sappho’s

³³ Antony H. Harrison, *Swinburne’s Medievalism: A Study in Victorian Love Poetry* (Baton Rouge: U Louisiana P, 1979), 68.

³⁴ This is true in spite of the clear symbolic opposition between an investment in bodily experience and adherence to Christian morality, because, for Swinburne, Christianity is not morally viable. That is, while the tragic futility of Tannhäuser’s dedication to Venus might appear to initiate an opposition between materiality and morality (“an erotically and aesthetically gratifying hell, rich with sensation”), I read “*Laus Veneris*” not as anti-Christian and consequently anti-moral, but rather moral precisely *because* it rejects the Christian rejection of the body and its experiences. For Swinburne, that is, ethical connections between individuals are always effected by means of the body, and so ethical sympathy – perhaps difficult to recognize in Swinburne’s poetry because it so clearly opposes traditional conceptions of disembodied spirituality, and because it insists on the transcendent value of intense sensory sensuous experience – always relies on bodily experience.

body (her blood and her veins) leaks out of her, mingling with that of Anactoria, a mingling that is echoed later when Sappho fantasizes herself “Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!” (l. 132). This sort of corporeal mingling is also figured as eating and drinking, of bodily incorporation as a means of both merging and ordering:

I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated
With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.
I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
And no mouth but some serpent’s found thee sweet. (ll. 23-26)

Sappho, “satiated” (suggesting “satisfied” as well as “saturated”) with having Anactoria alive, now wills the earth to eat Anactoria’s body and the serpent to find her “sweet” to consume. If Sappho no longer has access to Anactoria, access which is figured as bodily mingling and incorporation, then she wants “no mouth but some serpent’s” to have access to her.

Such literal bodily incorporation is also associated in the poem with sexual desire and the physical disintegration of sadomasochistic pleasure:

I would find grievous ways to have thee slain.
Intense device, and superflux of pain;
Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
Relapse and reluctance of the breath,
Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death. (ll. 27-34)

The intensity of the sensation Sappho wishes to inflict is directly contrasted with softness in a way that serves to highlight the desirability of sensation: the “pangs too soft to kill” that nonetheless “Strain out thy soul”; the “interludes” that are “intolerable” rather than offering respite from pain; the “Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death” that suggest both quiet and escape, as well as shuddering torment. The unexpected

oppositions also pair terms that form paradoxes: sound that is “dumb,” unspoken, mute; a soul that can be “strain[ed] out,” presumably from the body. Sappho wants to tease out an audible silence from Anactoria; this audible silence takes the form not of simple sound but of the “tunes and . . . semitones” that suggest music and, by extension, poetry. Silence, the absence of sound, takes the increasingly substantial forms of music and poetry, suggesting the possibility both of transformation from non-material to material and of access to the non-material through the body. This sound, whether of music or poetry, is imagined as if it had material shape and substance: it shudders, suggesting not only the vibration of sound or the wavering of a string but also the shivering of a body. Later, Sappho makes the association between bodies, in particular Anactoria’s, and poetry explicit: “but thou – thy body is the song, / Thy mouth the music” (ll. 74-75). In both cases, the effect is to heighten the intensity of Sappho’s intention as well as to underscore the degree to which the material and the non-material are interpermeable: one might equally reach silence by means of music, or poetry by means of silence.

This association between musical or poetic production and the tortured body continues throughout “Anactoria,” making music itself into a material body at the same time that the literal body is imagined as beyond Sappho’s reach. Sappho would “Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note, / Catch the sob’s middle music in thy throat, / Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these / A lyre of many faultless agonies” (ll. 137-40), make Anactoria into both the song and the instrument through the infliction of perfect pain. The construction of music is figured here as a process of separation as much as of synthesis: to “Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note” suggests the atomization of sound and echoes Venus’s separation of nerve, bone, and vein in the

creation of exquisitely pleasurable pain for the dead men who adore her. That is, musical notes might be built from (“struck from”) other notes, but the image also suggests a division, notes separated from other notes.³⁵ Like Swinburne’s often-used word, “cleave,” this image of notes and pangs being struck from others suggests both melding and division; and both “strike” and “cleave” also suggest the violence inherent in creation.³⁶ Anactoria’s living limbs would be remade into an instrument capable of inflicting – and produced by means of – “many faultless agonies.” Every part of musical production is imagined as both intensely physical and intensely painful in a way that suggests the inseparability of the three concepts.

By imagining Anactoria’s body both as the source of Sappho’s poetic inspiration and as the embodiment of poetry’s form, Swinburne multiplies the substitutions between and among body, soul, inspiration, desire, poetry, song, poet, and poem:

Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!

³⁵ Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), argues persuasively for the fragmentation of Anactoria’s body as a literalization of the fragmentation of Sappho’s poetic corpus, suggesting that for Swinburne, and for Sappho, the body and the poem become interchangeable, so that one can substitute for the other as an equal exchange: “What makes Sappho sublime is the mutilation of the Sapphic fragments, allowing her to be simultaneously dismembered and remembered, in a complex mediation between corpse and corpus: the body of the poet is sacrificed to the body of her song, and this body of song is sacrificed to posterity, which recollects the scattered fragments in order to recall Sappho herself as the long-lost origin of lyric poetry” (115-16). Prins goes on to note that the title of the poem (named for Anactoria rather than for Sappho, as might be expected) “identif[ies] Anactoria as the proper name for a Sapphic rhythm that is allegorized in Swinburne’s poem . . . [T]he title names ‘Anactoria’ as the rhythmicized body produced *by* the poem: a silent, absent body made present through Sappho’s verse, much as (on another level of representation) Sappho is also presented by Swinburne in the rhythmic form of this own verse” (128).

³⁶ Several critics have commented on Swinburne’s frequent use of “cleave” as a word that suggests two opposing meanings simultaneously. Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, offers one of the most cogent assessments: “Divided into many parts, separate but also together, different but also the same, Sappho and Anactoria embody the paradox of ‘flesh that cleaves;’ here, as so often in Swinburne’s verse, the verb ‘to cleave’ is used antithetically – meaning both ‘to join’ and ‘to separate’ – in order to describe a body held together only by falling apart. Thus Swinburne’s Sappho is undone as she is made by the force of her own sublime rhetoric” (117).

Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
The faint flakes from thy bosom to thy waist!
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! (ll. 105-14)

In wishing away her gift of poetry, Sappho substitutes her desire for Anactoria in place of her desire for poetic inspiration. Anactoria's bruised body makes visible Anactoria's pain, upon both of which Sappho would feed, first simply as an end in itself but almost immediately as a source of a substitute "Muses' milk." Anactoria's "sweet" blood feeds Sappho's erotic desire and her need for poetic inspiration, both of which are figured as intense bodily sensations nearly painful in their intensity. But Sappho's desire is not simply to "taste / the faint flakes" of "sweet" blood that have come from "thy sweet small wounds." Instead, Sappho wishes to devour Anactoria, body and blood: "That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat / Thy breasts like honey!" Not content with simply the "Muses' milk" of Anactoria's blood, seeping from wounds inflicted by a jealous Aphrodite, Sappho wants to incorporate and obliterate Anactoria's physical being. Anactoria will suffuse Sappho: she will not only be inside Sappho, but will be coextensive with her: "in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!" Anactoria's flesh will now be (and be in) Sappho's, and vice versa, suggesting possession and identity as much as containment. Yet this obliteration through consumption is in the service of creation as much as of destruction. Yopie Prins notes Swinburne's "pun on feet," suggesting "the embodiment of Sapphic meter in Anactoria, as she reincarnates the metrical limbs of

Sappho's song."³⁷ Anactoria, metonymized here as "The paces and pauses of thy feet" (l. 117), becomes literally the embodiment of metrics, of poetry.³⁸ Her body is further atomized in Sappho's appreciation of Anactoria's "fragrant" (l. 120) hair, her "shoulders whiter than a fleece of white" (l. 123), and her "flower-sweet fingers" (l. 124) with their "almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells" (l. 126). In the midst of her consumption of Anactoria, Sappho is the object of oral attack as well: "Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites, / Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites" (ll. 115-16). Anactoria's beauty stings Sappho in terms remarkably similar to Swinburne's description of the effect of poetry. In describing "Anactoria," he writes in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* that, "more than any other's, [Sappho's] verses strike and sting the memory in lonely places, or at sea, among all loftier sights and sounds . . . they seem akin to fire and air, being themselves 'all air and fire'; other element there is none in them" (SR 21). In his unfinished novel *Lesbia Brandon*, Lady Wariston describes poetry in similar terms: "Things in verse hurt one, don't they? hit and sting like a cut. They wouldn't hurt us if we had no blood, and no nerves. Verse hurts horribly . . . It's odd that words should change so just by being put into rhyme. They get teeth and bite; they take fire and burn. I wonder who first thought of tying words up and twisting them back to make verses, and hurt and delight all the people in the world for ever . . . one can't tell where the pain or

³⁷ Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 131.

³⁸ The Christian God against whom Swinburne-as-Sappho rails is also likened to poetry, but his is composed of "iron feet" (l. 172) that "threaten and trample all things" (l. 174). This God insists, according to Swinburne's conception, on the separation of body from soul rather than the endless substitutions and replacements possible in Swinburne's poetics; consequently, "the mute melancholy lust of heaven" (l. 170) replaces the song of tortured inspiration that Sappho sings. See Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, for her discussion of the many references to poetic feet in "Anactoria" (131).

the pleasure ends or begins.”³⁹ Paradoxically both embodied and disembodied, Anactoria is simultaneously poetry, the subject of this poem, the embodiment of a kind of poetics, and the inspiration for Sappho’s poetic creation.

Yet in spite of this consumption and re-figuring of Anactoria as Sapphic poetics, Sappho’s monologue remains an impossible fantasy, not a plan. That is to say, the conditional tense in which Sappho addresses Anactoria both articulates Sappho’s desires and admits their impossibility. Sappho may *want* to render Anactoria’s body into poetry by disarticulating and consuming it, may *desire* to mark Anactoria’s body in a way that speaks undeniably of Sappho’s access and Anactoria’s receptivity, but she either cannot or dares not do so.

. . . 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!
Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light?
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
Catch the sob’s middle music in thy throat,
Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
A lyre of many faultless agonies?
Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
And wring thy very spirit through the flesh? (ll. 129-144)

Spoken as ineffectual prayer rather than intention, these lines speak of Sappho’s sense of the unbridgeable distance between her and Anactoria as much as they reveal the intensity of her desire or the paradoxical unity and separation of material and spirit. “O that I

³⁹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Lesbia Brandon* (excerpted in McGann and Sligh [eds.], *Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, 452-66), 460.

/Durst,” laments Sappho; given the opportunity, she asks rhetorically, “Would I not plague thee,” “hurt thee,” “touch / Thy pores of sense with torture,” elicit “bloodlike tears,” “wring thy very spirit through the flesh”? These are not Sappho’s detailed plans, or even simple statements of desire; instead, they are the lament of one who cannot reach her beloved, to whom access is denied absolutely. The unspoken “if” is implicit in each conditional phrase: If I had access to you, if I could touch you, if you were available to me, if I could make you listen, if you had not left, if you still loved me. While the extremity of these images of physical and sexual violence does something to camouflage the conditional tense, the unspoken end result of each phrase is Sappho’s inability to do the thing she wishes.

It is her desperation to reach Anactoria, to mark her literally or metaphorically, rather than the kinds of pain that she would inflict that resonate most insistently here, and the impossibility of her desperation structures the entire poem. While Anactoria has a material effect on Sappho, Sappho can only wish she had the same degree of effect on Anactoria.

I *pray* thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
...
I *would* the sea had hidden us . . .
...
I *would* my love could kill thee . . .
. . . and *fain would* have thee dead.
I *would* earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
...
I *would find* grievous ways to have thee slain . . .
...
Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
...
That I could drink thy veins as wine . .
. . . that from face to feet

Thy body were abolished and consumed . . . (ll. 5, 7, 23-25, 27, 105-106, 111-13)

There is no “will” in Sappho’s address to the absent and unresponsive Anactoria; there is only “would.” In each case, the conditional “would” removes the action from the realm of intention, emphasizing instead its impossibility and, by extension, Sappho’s lack of access to Anactoria.

“Anactoria” is saturated with such images of violence, the infliction of pain, and the incorporation of (parts of) the lover’s body, and these images render conspicuous the importance of materiality in Swinburne’s conception of relationality. Yet in the midst of these dense images of materiality and of the specificity of individual experience, the impossibility of Sappho’s desires suggests both the necessity and the difficulty of human connection. Further, as in Rossetti’s poems, the tension between materiality and disembodiment, between particular and iconic representations, problematizes any ready alignment between either materiality or spirituality and humane-ness or morality. On the most obvious level, the interaction between individuals in these poems is scripted in legend and history, determined long before Swinburne wrote his own versions of their stories.⁴⁰ In one sense, then, these are purely iconic characters – Venus, Sappho, Anactoria, Tannhäuser – rather than fully realized individuals. Unlike Rossetti’s

⁴⁰ Swinburne accentuates this characteristic of his poems by creating literary or mythological antecedents even where none exist. William Michael Rossetti, in his 1866 defense of Swinburne, *Swinburne’s Poems and Ballads* (reprinted in Hyder, *SCH*), notes that “The ‘Laus Veneris’, itself sufficiently independent of models, is prefaced by a paragraph in old French purporting to be extracted from a ‘*Livre des Grandes Merveilles d’Amour, escript en Latin et en François par Maistre Antoine Gaget, 1530*’, but which we confidently father upon Mr. Swinburne himself” (*SCH* 69-70). Similarly, Catherine Maxwell, *Swinburne* (Devon: Northcote, 2006), notes Swinburne’s use of art and literature as models for several of his poems, identifying three poems that “directly allude to art works:” “A Christmas Carol” and D. G. Rossetti’s painting of the same name; “Before the Mirror” and Whistler’s *The Little White Girl/Symphony in White No. 2*; and “Hermaphroditus” and the Louvre statue. “Erotion,” while not exactly modeled on art, was a comment on Simeon Solomon’s *Damon and Aglae*. Maxwell links Swinburne’s creation of a so-called source text for “Laus Veneris” to his interest in the dialogue between works of art (25).

characterizations, which oscillate between the extremes of iconic and realistic, Swinburne's exist simultaneously at both poles: Venus, for example, is both the abstracted embodiment of love and erotic desire, who exists beyond the boundary of human interaction, and a fully embodied character.⁴¹ Likewise, Sappho is both a woman who wants desperately to renew her relationship with her beloved and, simultaneously, "simply nothing less . . . than the greatest poet who ever was at all."⁴²

Ethics and Materiality

In his 1866 defense of Swinburne, William Michael Rossetti both praised Swinburne for his ability to enter sympathetically into the mind and imagination of his poetic models and identified Swinburne's greatest fault as his lack of sympathy for people of his own time and place. "Mr. Swinburne, being truly a poet, a man of imagination, penetrates, by the force of imagination as well as of studentship, into the imaginative identity of poetic models of past time, and thence into their embodying forms . . . [T]he determined set of his intellect towards art, and consequently towards literary art, possesses him with so sharp a sympathy for the literary or poetic models of highest style that, as the mood varies, he can pitch his mind into true harmonic concert with Chaucer now, now with Dante, Sophocles, Keats, or Hugo, and sing, as it were, new vocal music to the accompaniment of these most definite, dominant, and unperishing melodies" (*SCH* 71). At the same time, though, Rossetti identifies the "main source of

⁴¹ Harrison, *Swinburne's Medievalism*, notes that Venus "is at once, in the poem, a real woman, an ideal, and a myth" (60).

⁴² Lang (ed.), *Letters*, 4:124.

shortcomings in our poet – the deficiency of broad frank sympathies, or (to use the common and here very apposite term) of ‘fellow-feeling’” (*SCH* 84). In this conception, Swinburne fails to sympathize with his public while creating verse that demonstrates almost unaccountable sympathy with the minds of the artists who are his models.

If Swinburne’s (and Rossetti’s) contemporaries found these poets lacking in their ability to sympathize with them and their attitudes, current readers have found particularly Swinburne far more sympathetic, usually in terms of the response his verse elicits from them. Catherine Maxwell notes that “Swinburne’s readers are meant to experience themselves as physical as well as intellectual beings as the verse communicates simultaneously to the mind and senses, predominantly through that psychologically-charged bodily element: the nerves,” a process she likens to “a parodic version of sympathy.”⁴³ They do this by eliciting somatic responses from their readers in much the way Buchanan and others criticized them for; but they also encourage sympathy by putting their readers inside the poem rather than outside. Rossetti’s “inner standing point” in this sense refers not only to the poet’s relationship to the subjects of his poems but also to the readers, who are encouraged (or forced) to assume the perspective of the poems’ speakers. For readers of “Jenny” in particular, this sympathetic identification between reader and speaker is uncomfortable, since it makes readers complicit in the morally questionable stance the speaker has toward Jenny. In other poems, the sympathetic identification between reader and poem (or speaker) is more

⁴³ Catherine Maxwell, “Swinburne: Style, Sympathy, and Sodomasochism” (*The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 12 [Fall 2003], 86-94), 88, 90.

positive if equally disquieting. In Swinburne's "Pasiphaë,"⁴⁴ for example, Daedalus demonstrates his sympathy with Pasiphaë's agony of desire for the bull both by crafting the wooden cow for her and by describing her sensations in terms that suggest he understands them, even that he has experienced them himself. Further, Daedalus's careful description both of Pasiphaë's predicament and of his solution draws the reader into Pasiphaë's situation, making that reader not only complicit (as Rossetti's reader of "Jenny" might be) but also sympathetic toward Pasiphaë.⁴⁵ Swinburne's earliest and most hostile critics attacked Swinburne for the immorality of his poetry, often in terms of the immorality it encouraged in his readers, and the moral contagion Robert Buchanan attributed to Rossetti and the Fleshly School is in essence simply a dangerous version of sympathetic communication. Had Swinburne and Rossetti encouraged less physiological responses from their readers, or had their poems contained less supposedly immoral material, their ability to elicit sympathetic feeling would likely not have been questioned.

I have argued that both Rossetti and Swinburne articulate a kind of sympathy within their poems that is predicated on immediacy, sensation, and embodiment rather than on distance and imagination. If sympathy is the main requisite for Victorian morality, I suggest that we see Swinburne's and Rossetti's version of sympathy as at least

⁴⁴ "Pasiphaë" has never been included in any collections of Swinburne's poetry. Catherine Maxwell's inclusion of the poem as an appendix to her *Swinburne* marks the first time it has been "reprinted . . . for a general audience" (49). The poem exists in a British Library manuscript (MS Ashley 5097, fos. 47-41) and in limited-issue printings such as Randolph Hughes (ed.), *Pasiphaë: A Poem* (London: Golden Cockerell P, 1950), which was printed privately and limited to 500 copies. Hughes's edition, which states that the poem is "now correctly printed for the first time," includes a number of copper engravings of various episodes from the poem. Hughes's introduction lists only one other printing of the poem, in T. J. Wise (ed.), *Lady Maisie's Bairn and Other Poems*, of which only twenty copies were printed for private circulation and which included a number of textual errors (5).

⁴⁵ Catherine Maxwell, *Swinburne*, discusses the sympathetic relationships between poet, poem, characters, and reader in "Pasiphaë" at some length (49-54).

potentially moral. Both poets envision communion between individuals as a constituent feature of humanity, possible to varying degrees within the existing structure of the world. Rossetti questions the possibility of establishing, and certainly of maintaining, the detailed and thorough awareness of the other as a particular individual that is necessary for this version of sympathy to work morally: the young man of the world finds it ultimately impossible to resist the temptation to imagine Jenny as a generic prostitute rather than as an individual, while the damozel and her lover are finally unable to bridge the distance between the abstract and the material. Swinburne's Tannhäuser and Sappho believe in the necessity of seeking communion with the beloved through the body; the inaccessibility of each body suggests not that materiality is divorced from morality but rather that each speaker doubts the ultimate possibility of human connection. In both cases, however, any possibility of moral – humane, fully human – connection is possible only through materiality; disembodied spirituality for both poets suggests only absence and inaccessibility.

Some recent critics have made explicit the transcendence they find in this poetry, particularly in Swinburne's poems, while noting that the poetry remains firmly embedded in the material world.⁴⁶ Other readers claim that the poems depict a new kind of materiality. For example, Harold Bloom argues that Rossetti, "a convinced sensualist,

⁴⁶ For example, Rooksby, "The Algernonicon," notes that although some critics have recently "been ready to praise Swinburne for the un-Victorian willingness with which he jettisons anything that might resemble belief in a transcendent dimension, and extolls instead a naturalistic vision of humanity's place as material creatures in a material cosmos," Rooksby recognizes that "Swinburne's language admits of the possibility of a reading that sees another dimension to the world that goes beyond physical realities alone" (78). Judith Stoddart, "The Morality of *Poems and Ballads*: Swinburne and Ruskin" (Rooksby and Shrimpton [eds.], *The Whole Music of Passion*, 92-106), identifies a similar insistence "on its [the soul's] identification with the mortal body," and claims that the poetry praises "not an aesthetic divorced from morality, but an alternative moral aesthetic, one which naturally embraces both sides of human nature" (97).

writes a naturalistic poetry that yet rejects natural forms,” and that his “lyrics and sonnets are set in a world that is at once phantasmagoria and nature, giving the effect of an artificial nature . . . It is impossible . . . to decide whether we stand in the remembered natural world, or in some purgatorial realm heavier and more naturally luxurious than nature could ever have been.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, Lise Rodgers writes of “Jenny” that “the truth is that the passions – or the flesh – are *morally supreme* within the world of Jenny and her young man” and that “[t]his truth involves the realization not only that the sensual, as opposed to the rational, is more conducive to compassion, but that it is the most ‘natural’ state of man, the most preferable, and above all, the *most moral*.”⁴⁸ Like Rodgers, I argue that the material *does* form the basis of the sense of morality present in Rossetti’s and Swinburne’s poems; however, Rodgers’s formulation does not address the fascinating conflict in representation that is at the heart of my analysis, nor does it acknowledge the uneasiness with which both poets approach both materiality and spirituality. The constantly shifting emphasis in representation from conventionalized, iconic, and abstracted images to far more individualized and material depictions suggests an almost irreconcilable tension between the material and the ephemeral or spiritual, and to insist solely upon the material is to reduce the poems’ complexity.

The tension between iconic and individual bodies in Swinburne and Rossetti might also be figured as a conflict between vision and touch. The iconic bodies in these poems – the damozel as emparadised beloved, Jenny as generalized prostitute, Anactoria

⁴⁷ Harold Bloom, “Introduction” (in Harold Bloom [ed.], *Pre-Raphaelite Poets* [New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986], 1-6), 3.

⁴⁸ Rodgers, “The Book and the Flower,” 22, 23; italics in original.

as unavailable lover, Venus as non-responsive goddess – are available to the speakers only, or primarily, through vision (or, in the case of the damozel, a form of visual imagination). In each case, as the woman at the center of the poem becomes more material, more individualized, the speaker experiences her increasingly through (literal or imagined) touch. In Rossetti's poems, this tactility takes the form of specific material details, such as the way the damozel's hair brushes the speaker's cheek. In Swinburne's poems, tactility is generally presented as an impossibility, one that takes the form of a fantasy of sexualized violence. In both cases, when the desired woman is available only in the register of the visual, no connection appears possible; it is only as she approaches the register of the tactile that connection becomes more possible: the fact that Anactoria and Venus elude the speaker's touch simply underscores the impossibility of connecting to them.

The association between tactility and connection suggests materiality and embodiment as important elements of humanity, human-ness, humane-ness. Interestingly, however, especially given the association these poets seem to have with materialism, with the "fleshly school of poetry," which purportedly gives precedence to the body over the soul, neither poet presents embodiment as fully successful and straightforward. Such embodiment, and the consequent human connection it would enable, is ultimately impossible in Swinburne's poems, while Rossetti presents it as not wholly desired; Swinburne's speakers seem able to achieve contact with the women they address only through the fantasy of violent eros, while Rossetti's speakers, who have (or had) access to the real, material women they describe, prefer instead the disembodied creations of their imaginations; Swinburne's speakers want to touch, but can only look,

while Rossetti's speakers are (or were) able to touch, but prefer to look and imagine. Far from presenting a clean and total alignment with materiality, these poems simultaneously insist on and refuse corporeality. As readers, we experience these poems in an analogous way, shifting from the visual (and distant) to the tactile (and immediate). The immediacy of these poems touches the reader physically, demanding a physiological as well as an affective response. Like the sometimes-iconic, sometimes-individualistic characters that people these poems, we as readers shift between affective engagement with the texts and self-contained evaluative distance; also like the characters, we make connections with the text most successfully when we experience these poems somatically and physiologically rather than cognitively, when we allow ourselves to be, in the words of Jerome McGann, "percipient creature[s]"⁴⁹ within the world each poem produces. It is this sense of full material engagement that underlies the moral system predicated on corporeal sympathy, a version of materiality both Rossetti and Swinburne insist upon, although uneasily, in their poetry.

⁴⁹ Jerome McGann, "Introduction" (in McGann and Sligh [eds.], *Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, xv-xxviii), xxvi.

Chapter 5

Corporeal Sympathy and Divine Amoralism in Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Terrible' Sonnets and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

In an 1879 sermon on Christ as hero, Gerard Manley Hopkins describes Christ as a warrior, king, and statesman; he is a thinker and an orator; he is “all the world’s hero, the desire of nations” and “the true love and bridegroom of men’s souls.” Hopkins’s text for the sermon, “The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him” (Luke 2:33), establishes humanness as the guiding structure for the sermon, and his depiction presents the heroic perfection of Christ in exclusively human terms:

There met in Jesus Christ all things that can make man lovely and loveable. In his body he was most beautiful. . . . [A]ccounts of him written in early times . . . tell us that he was moderately tall, well built and slender in frame, his features straight and beautiful, his hair inclining to auburn, parted in the midst, curling and clustering about the ears and neck . . . I come to his mind . . . You must not say, Christ needed no such thing as genius; his wisdom came from heaven, for he was God. To say so is to speak like the heretic Apollinaris¹ . . . No, but Christ was perfect man and must have mind as well as body and that mind was, no question, of the rarest excellence and beauty; it was genius. As Christ lived and breathed and moved in a true and not a phantom human body . . . so he reasoned and made and planned and invented by acts of his own human genius, genius made perfect by wisdom of its own, not the divine wisdom only. . . . Now in the third place, far higher than beauty of the body, higher than genius and wisdom the beauty of the mind, comes the beauty of his character, his character as man.²

Hopkins is making implicit use here of orthodox Christian theology that insists upon the

¹ Apollinarianism is a heresy that claims that the *logos*, the Word of God, replaces in Christ the human mind, so that Christ is said to have no human intellect or reason. Apollinaris lived in the late fourth century C.E.; his teaching was declared heretical by Pope Damasus at the Council of Rome in 381. See “Apollinarianism,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

² Gerard Manley Hopkins, Sermon delivered 23 November 1879 at Bedford Leigh (in Catherine Phillips [ed.], *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works* [Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2002], 275-78), 276-78.

simultaneous full humanity and full divinity of Christ articulated in the doctrine of the hypostatic union, a doctrine recently reasserted by the First Vatican Council in 1869-1870.³ What interests me here, though, is less the doctrinal context in which Hopkins composed this sermon and more his insistence on representing the humanity of Christ in particularly material terms, evidenced by the care he takes in representing the materiality of Christ's humanity. Hopkins's Christ is not only fully human in theory; he is materially an individual man, complete with describable features and hairstyle. Hopkins's insistence on embodiment and materiality as coextensive with the divinity of Christ implies a definition of the human that challenges the traditional conception of the irreconcilable duality of the human condition: comprised of both body and spirit, animal and god, in constant zero-sum conflict with each other.⁴ In Hopkins's model, Christ's nature is also dual – both human and divine – but the two aspects are mutually constitutive rather than oppositional. Indeed, Hopkins's emphasis on the loveliness and loveableness of Christ's material humanity suggests not only that materiality need not be opposed to spirituality but that bodily presence is a constituent feature of moral humanity.

In clear opposition to the usual conception of Christian morality that gives precedence to spirituality and imaginative sympathy, Hopkins's sermon indicates the presence of an alternative version of morality in which material embodiment is its foundation rather than its antagonist. That alternative depends upon material embodiment, proximity, and touch, a version of corporeal sympathy that connects

³ In addition to Apollinaris, his implicit doctrinal opponents in this sermon seem to be the advocates of the monophysite heresy, which claimed that Christ was fully divine rather than human. See Chapter 1 above for more detail on these ideas.

⁴ I discuss this traditional concept of the human at greater length in the Introduction.

morality to the body and to sensory perception. While the concerns of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry initially seem a world away from those of H. G. Wells's nightmarish science fiction novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, the texts are connected by their insistence on the relationship between bodily sensation and humanity; more specifically, these texts rely on pain as a marker of the human, and on sensitivity to pain in others – that is, sympathy – as a necessary foundation of morality. In analyzing these two authors' texts in connection to each other, I argue that pain paradoxically connects and distinguishes between the human and the non-human, and that it simultaneously insists on and denies a spiritual essence of humanity. However, rather than suggest that this paradox undermines the ideological or aesthetic effectiveness of either author's texts, I argue that this paradoxical use of pain indicates that both authors identify material embodiment as a necessary condition of morality. This argument claims a reversal of the relationship between body and spirit originating in the Cartesian hierarchy that ranks the spirit as more valuable and important than the body. This Cartesian opposition understands the body as the mortal husk that hampers and weighs down the immortal soul, the material baggage that leads the soul into temptation and sin. In direct opposition to this traditional conception, these texts insist upon material embodiment as a prerequisite for humanness and morality and link noncorporeality not to perfection but to amorality.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Hopkins and Wells establish the limits and constitutive elements of humanity. I begin with a brief discussion of the ways in which Hopkins's conversion to Catholicism both shaped and reflected his understanding of the value of materiality, and then discuss that version of materiality in the context of two poems. From there, I turn to Hopkins's so-called "terrible sonnets"

and examine the consequences of the removal of materiality from human experience. Having established the role of materiality and embodiment in Hopkins's conception of humaneness and morality, I consider *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and its use of pain as a technology of transformation and evaluation. Finally, I consider the consequences of disembodiment in the moral and social hierarchy the novel has established.

Hopkins, Catholicism, and Embodiment

While Hopkins's poems, written between the 1860s and the 1880s, do not engage directly or explicitly in the debate about materialism, they do so implicitly and indirectly through their vivid representations of material embodiment, and in particular through images of intense physiological sensation. As several critics have noted, Hopkins's belief in the importance of material embodiment has deep connections to his conversion to Catholicism;⁵ in an early letter to his father concerning his conversion at Oxford, Hopkins states that it is the Catholic doctrine of Incarnation that is foundational to his attraction to Catholicism and that stands as his central article of faith.⁶ More than twenty years after

⁵ See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (1963; rpt. New York: Schocken Books, 1965), and Daniel A. Harris, *Inspirations Unbidden: The "Terrible Sonnets" of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Berkeley: U California Press, 1982).

⁶ "I shall hold as a Catholic what I have long held as an Anglican, that literal truth of our Lord's words by which I learn that the least fragment of the consecrated elements in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the whole Body of Christ born of the Blessed Virgin, before which the whole host of saints and angels as it lies on the altar trembles with adoration. This belief once got is the life of the soul and when I doubted it I shd. become an atheist the next day. But, as monsignor Eyre says, it is a gross superstition unless guaranteed by infallibility. I cannot hold this doctrine confessedly except as a Tractarian or a Catholic: the Tractarian ground I have seen broken to pieces under my feet." Gerard Manley Hopkins, letter to his father, 16 October 1866 (in Phillips [ed.], *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 224). Later in the same letter, after concluding this discussion of his stance toward transubstantiation, Hopkins asks his father to "approach Christ in a new way," in the way Hopkins himself does, "that is, not vaguely, but casting yourselves into His sacred broken heart and His five adorable Wounds." Importantly for Hopkins, Christ must be approached through these marks of his material humanity or not at all: "Those who do not pray to Him in His Passion pray to God but scarcely to Christ" (225).

his conversion, in a set of retreat notes from 1889, Hopkins maintained the importance of the Incarnation to his religious belief: “But our lives and in particular those of religious, as mine, are in their whole direction, not only inwardly but most visibly and outwardly, shaped by Christ’s. Without that even outwardly the world could be so different that we cannot even guess it. And my life is determined by the Incarnation down to most of the details of the day.”⁷ Hilary Fraser claims that Hopkins’s sense of the importance of the Incarnation extended beyond the person of Christ to the material presence of God in the world more generally: “Hopkins’ contribution to the sacramental tradition was to consider nature as expressive of Christ incarnate as well as of God the creator, of the ‘redemptive strain’ as well as the ‘creative strain’. Christ incarnate, the physical manifestation of God, represented for Hopkins, in His selfhood, the pattern, the inscape, to which all created forms aspire. . . . Hopkins’ awareness of Christ as the divine archetype of created beauty . . . enabled him to merge his love of beauty and poetic creativity with his religious commitment.”⁸ The doctrine of the Incarnation provides Hopkins with a model for understanding the value of material embodiment, which he extends to include not only humans but the natural world.

Hopkins’s idea of inscape appears connected both ethically and aesthetically to his understanding of the Incarnation. Fraser calls the concept of inscape a “highly sophisticated and unique religio-aesthetic theory,” noting that “inscape became the common denominator of religious, aesthetic, and poetic experience alike. Christ

⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, Retreat Notes, 1 January 1889, Tullabeg (in Phillips [ed.], *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 302).

⁸ Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1986), 70.

represented the ultimate inscape, and through His Incarnation the principles of perfect physical and moral beauty, love, and sacrifice become manifest in the created world.”⁹ It seems, in fact, as if the insistence upon the material presence of God in Christ makes possible, for Hopkins and perhaps for Christianity in general, a sense of inherent value in matter. I will discuss the concept of inscape at more length below, but at this point want simply to note that inscape depends upon materiality: if inscape is the essence, either generic or individual, of a particular thing, that inscape can only be demonstrated, acted upon, through the mediation of materiality and bodies.

The Incarnation is not the only doctrinal aspect of Catholicism that reinforces Hopkins’s valuing of the material world. The doctrine of transubstantiation appears equally important both to Hopkins’s Catholicism and to his poetry. Literally the doctrine that the substance of the bread and wine of communion is converted through the priest’s words into the substance of Christ’s body and blood, with all outward characteristics of bread and wine remaining, transubstantiation is a process by which one material substance becomes another totally different material substance (although the difference is imperceptible to human senses) through a mysterious and entirely spiritual process in which a priest acts as medium or intermediary. Not only does the bread become the body of Christ, but it (and the wine) contains the whole being of Christ in each particle; it is a material incarnation of God that is to be consumed, taken into the body: “the least fragment of the consecrated elements in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the whole Body of Christ born of the Blessed Virgin, before which the whole host of saints and

⁹ Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, 70.

angels as it lies on the altar trembles with adoration.”¹⁰ Not symbolic presence, through the doctrine of transubstantiation the Real Presence of Christ is taken into the material bodies of communicants.¹¹

Poetics and Sensation

The centrality of incarnation, of the immanence of God in human form as well as in the rest of the world, of the conception of Christ as simultaneously fully human and fully divine, is also visible in Hopkins’s poems and their various representations of embodiment. In this section, I look closely at two poems, “The Habit of Perfection” and “As kingfishers catch fire,” in order to examine the function of materiality and embodiment. In doing so, I argue that these two poems insist upon the necessity of material presence, and in fact imagine God to be accessible only through the mediation of the material.

“The Habit of Perfection”¹² presents clear images of bodily sensation, touch, and incorporation, and in doing so establishes sensory and somatic experience as the necessary foundation for human access to God.

Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorlèd ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be

¹⁰ Gerard Manley Hopkins, letter to his father, 16 October 1866 (in Phillips [ed.], *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 224).

¹¹ For detailed information on the history and development of both the theology and practice surrounding the doctrine of transubstantiation, see entries for “Transubstantiation,” “consubstantiation,” “Real Presence,” and “Hypostatic Union” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

¹² Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Habit of Perfection.” This and all other Hopkins poems discussed in this chapter are from Phillips (ed.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, and will be cited parenthetically by line number in the text.

The music that I care to hear.

Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb:
It is the shut, the curfew sent
From there where all surrenders come
Which only makes you eloquent.

Be shellèd, eyes, with double dark
And find the uncreated light:
This ruck and reel which you remark
Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight.

Palate, the hutch of tasty lust,
Desire not to be rinsed with wine:
The can must be so sweet, the crust
So fresh that come in fasts divine!

Nostrils, your careless breath that spend
Upon the stir and keep of pride,
What relish shall the censers send
Along the sanctuary side!

O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet
That want the yield of plushy sward,
But you shall walk the golden street
And you unhouse and house the Lord.

And, Poverty, be thou the bride
And now the marriage feast begun,
And lily-coloured clothes provide
Your spouse not laboured-at nor spun.

The body is alternately anatomized into its constituent parts (lips, eyes, palate, nostrils, hands, feet) and imagined as the passive object of sensory experience (the ear, for example, is “beat[en]” upon), with the ultimate effect of highlighting the materiality of the body (rather than its agency) and the force of somatic and sensory experience (rather than its consequence). Sounds “beat upon” eardrums (l. 2), mouths taste and consume, nostrils inhale, and hands and feet touch. Comprised of seven stanzas, the poem opens

and closes with invocations to personages exterior to the speaker's own body while the central five stanzas each address a particular body part associated with sensory experience. The first and last stanzas are addressed to personified absences – “Elected Silence” (l. 1) and “Poverty” (l. 25) – both capitalized, suggesting that they are proper nouns to be used as means of address, but evacuated of any material substance because of the negation inherent in each concept. (Silence, of course, is the absence of sound, while poverty is the absence of wealth; taken together, then, “Elected Silence” and “Poverty” represent the presence of personified absence.) Throughout the poem, Hopkins's speaker celebrates the paradoxically sensory intensity of each variety of absence: the “whorlèd ear” that hears best the music of “Elected Silence” (ll. 2, 1); the mute lips whose silent surrender is most “eloquent” (l. 8); the closed eyes that see “the uncreated light” (l. 10); the “palate” that takes most delight in the taste of “fasts divine” (ll. 13, 16); the nostrils devoted solely to the scent of incense; hands whose sole purpose is to open and close the tabernacle and feet that walk only on the golden streets of heaven. The poem suggests that the “Perfection” of the title lies in complete disembodiment, paradoxically depicted in the poem itself as physiological sensation.

Throughout the poem, the presumed instantiation of perfection – God – exists as absence: addressed as “Elected Silence” (l. 1), God is figured as perfect absence (suggestively, the absence of sound and communication), while the “fasts divine” (l. 16) suggest a sort of holy absence of material sustenance. The poem invokes absence in every stanza: Hopkins's speaker longs to hear only silent music, while “Elected Silence” suggests both the evacuated absence of the voice of God and the still, small voice of the

conscience,¹³ the internal, noncorporeal remnant of divinity housed within each human being. The silent surrenders tendered by the lips that are “lovely-dumb” (l. 5) are evocative of both the speaker’s assumed surrender to the will of God and the always-possible surrender to the temptation presented by desires of the body; the eloquence of silence ensures that the surrender be forever ambiguous. The eyes of stanza three exist in the “double dark” (l. 9) of lowered eyelids and mortal ignorance and (presumably) sin; yet another negation is present in the “uncreated light” (l. 10), which is visible only when actual sight is prevented. This stanza presents then a double negation: closed eyes and the darkness of human existence combined with the presence of the uncreated light (which, because it is “uncreated,” lies outside the control of the omnipotent creator God of Genesis, who created light and dark through the spoken word). The “hutch of tasty lust” (l. 13) is called on to reject desire for the sweetness of wine and instead to savor the fresh sweetness of “fasts divine” (l. 16). Nostrils that might ordinarily flare with misplaced and sinful pride are called on to transfer their attention to sacramental incense. These are also statements of renunciation, of asceticism: the (attempted) refusal of sensation suggests the speaker’s desire to be rid of his/her material body. That the desire for renunciation is articulated so precisely in terms of somatic experience only highlights the importance of materiality, however, ultimately calling even greater attention to the mediating role of the bodily senses.

Hands and feet that have hitherto reveled in the material pleasures of the created

¹³ 1 Kings 19:11-12: “And he [the Lord] said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (KJV).

world – primroses and soft turf – are to turn their attention toward experiencing the presence of God in decidedly uncreated and non-human ways: the golden streets of heaven replace the “plushy sward” for the feet, while the speaker calls upon his hands to open and close the tabernacle (“unhouse and house the Lord” [l. 24]), to cover and uncover, retrieve and replace the physical manifestation of God, the word made flesh, the Bible that displaces the incarnated body of Christ as the material word of God, and the communion Host. That the human corporeality of Christ is replaced in this poem by the material book and bread reinforces the abstraction and noncorporeality present, paradoxically, throughout the poem in images of bodily sensation. Finally, the last stanza also invokes a personified absence (Poverty) who will provide her spouse with “lily-coloured clothes” “not laboured-at nor spun” (ll. 27, 28). This personified absence provides garments defined by what they are not rather than by what they are, invoking in the process the lilies of the field dressed in finer glory than King Solomon. In short, in this poem, sensory perception mediates the speaker’s encounter with divinity.

In defining life as “a continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations,”¹⁴ Herbert Spencer highlighted the mediating role of the senses in the constant interaction between organism and medium. Sensory perception similarly mediates between human and divinity in “The Habit of Perfection.” In spite of the poem’s explicit emphasis on lack and absence, the language insists upon embodiment and sensation, suggesting that even renunciation and asceticism, as well as spirituality more generally, depend on somatic experience. The speaker in this poem seems to derive pleasure (even

¹⁴ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Greene, and Longmans, 1855), 374.

sensory pleasure) from the contemplation of the *lack* of sensation; this is reminiscent of the descriptions of the pleasure Dorothea took in thinking about renouncing horseback riding. Like Dorothea, who derives physiological pleasure through the sensations evoked in ascesis, this poem's speaker returns always to the presence of the body and its sensations. The ascesis, the sensory renunciation, is attempted in service of a turning inward, of spiritual contemplation. This poem presents that inward contemplation – the desire to leave behind the things of the material world in an attempt to focus on the world of the spirit and of God – as inescapably material and sensory, yet there appears to be no anxiety about the insistence of sensory experience. The poem's insistence on the inescapability of bodily sensation, coupled with the absence of anxiety, suggests that sense experience remains fundamental to Hopkins's conception of both mediation and access to the divine.

By making material embodiment a necessary factor in self-articulation, Hopkins's often-cited concept of inscape, evident with particular explicitness in "As kingfishers catch fire," further connects his spirituality to material existence and sensation:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.* (ll. 1-8)

Hopkins's inscape – the generic essence of each type of creature or object – depends on the materiality of the thing. In this poem, it is "each mortal thing" (l. 5), rather than God, that "Deals out" (l. 6) itself, expresses its essence; it unfolds itself, apparently under its

own volition. Since the objects in the first stanza include nonliving objects such as stones and bells in addition to sentient creatures, it would appear that it is not only “mortal thing[s]” (l. 5) that possess or express inscape; rather, objects seem as capable as creatures of such self-expression. In his interpretation of Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno, John Tyndall writes that Bruno “came to the conclusion that nature in her productions does not imitate the technic of man. Her process is one of unravelling and unfolding. The infinity of forms under which matter appears were not imposed upon it by an external artificer; by its own intrinsic force and virtue it brings these forms forth.”¹⁵ The “selving” of Hopkins’s poem echoes the “unravelling and unfolding” of nature, and suggests the necessity of materiality for such a project of becoming. In this poem, the sounds of stones and plucked strings and rung bells depend entirely on their materiality and so, consequently, does their generic essence, their inscape. A stone *is* a stone because – and insofar as – it sounds like a stone, behaves like a stone, has the physical materiality of a stone. This is true even though Hopkins’s concept of inscape appears to depend just as much on the presence of the “being indoors each one” (l. 6), the essential being dwelling inside each material form; that is, this “being” insists that material existence is not the sum total of any given object or creature, but insists equally that such material existence is necessary for the “selving” of the process of inscape. Indeed, the idea that the interior “being” must reveal itself through this “selving” process rather than being automatically and constantly accessible necessitates an external component: the non-material essence requires an external material corollary.

¹⁵ John Tyndall, “Address Delivered Before the British Association Assembled at Belfast, With Additions” (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1874), 19.

“Kingfishers” also provides a vivid example of the importance of bodily materiality in Hopkins’s conception of Christ, which includes not only the incarnation of the singular person of Jesus but also the incarnation of Christ in the world, particularly, although not exclusively, in humans.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is –
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces. (ll. 9-14)

That Hopkins calls Christ “lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes” (l. 13) underscores the full embodiment of God: Hopkins’s Christ is not simply analogous to humans but is rather fully and materially human while simultaneously remaining fully divine. Further, people are made lovely to God through the presence of Christ in them, but Christ is also made lovely (to “the Father” but also, presumably, to humans) through the bodies he metaphorically, and yet somehow literally, slips into.¹⁶ The concept of physical beauty may capture the complexity of Hopkins’s image of Christ specifically and of human embodiment more generally.¹⁷ Hopkins’s Christ is “lovely,” a word that rings with other

¹⁶ The doubling of literal and metaphorical incorporation again echoes the doctrine of transubstantiation, as well as the sacrament of the eucharist more generally.

¹⁷ Of the importance of beauty, Hopkins wrote in an October 25, 1879 letter to Bridges, “I think then no one can admire beauty of the body more than I do, and it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous. Then comes the beauty of the mind, such as genius, and this is greater than the beauty of the body and not to call dangerous. And more beautiful than the beauty of the mind is beauty of character, the ‘handsome heart’. Now every beauty is not a wit or genius nor has every wit or genius character. For though even bodily beauty, even the beauty of blooming health, is from the soul, in the sense, as we Aristotelian Catholics say, that the soul is the form of the body, yet the soul may have no other beauty, so to speak, than that which it expresses in the symmetry of the body” (Philips [ed.], *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 240). Here he asserts a hierarchy of value, with the beauty of the body superseded by that of the intellect, both of which are of less value than the beauty of character. Yet he also acknowledges the inseparability of the soul’s beauty from the body: the body is a necessary representation of the soul. Without the body, it seems, the soul has no agency and might as well have no existence.

near homophones: loving (toward the world generally, toward individual persons specifically); loved; filled with love; lovable (in the sense of being worthy of love, which introduces an opposition to the invocation of grace – undeserved love – from earlier in the stanza). Hopkins’s “loveliness” and its cognates combine the adoration of a deity with the erotic charge of literal physical bodies: the limbs and eyes of Christ’s constantly recurring, constantly shifting incarnation.¹⁸

The loveliness of Christ’s incarnation underscores a structural characteristic of the sonnet as well. Although corporeality and material existence fill the poem from beginning to end, the poem moves from non-human (and often non-sentient) materiality to full human embodiment at the stanza break, suggesting not a progression from material to spiritual but rather the loveliness and necessity of human embodiment to the process of “Keep[ing] grace” (l. 10) and “Act[ing] in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is – / Christ” (ll. 11-12). In other words, the stanza structure suggests an emphasis on the necessary connection between materiality and inscape for human identity and for the immanence of God. Humans, that is, act as Christ only through their material bodies, through the actions they perform: “The just man justices.” It is not possible, in Hopkins’s conception either of Christian obligation or of inscape, for the essential being inside each person fully to exist without the mediation of the body. What it means to “justice” may not be entirely clear, but it is certainly as active and as material as the stones ringing in wells.

¹⁸ Joseph Bristow, “‘Churlsgace’: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Working-Class Masculinity” (*ELH* 59.3 [1992], 693-711), discusses Hopkins’s representations of Christ’s masculinity, particularly in terms of physical strength and spiritual submission in relation to John the Baptist. Bristow’s main concern in the article is “Hopkins’s unswerving attention to the embodiment of divine power in differing types of laboring men, and the problems he must confront when these idealized figures fall short of their biblical archetype in the mighty winnower heroized by John” (694).

Hopkins's inscape ties identity to action, makes the two synonymous, which means that identity can no longer be simply a matter of private interiority. What it is to be human is only evidenced through actions done by and with the physical body. The repeated incarnation of Christ in humanity is possible only through the materiality of the body. The shift from the first stanza, in which animals and objects express their inscape through the generic actions associated with their group, to the second stanza, in which God becomes incarnate through the infinitely variable instances of human identity, suggests two things: first, that material embodiment is always necessary for a thing to act fully as itself; and second, that it is human embodiment that allows the immanence of God in the world, and consequently the possibility of humane (ethical) existence.

Hopkins's prose also demonstrates his view of the senses and bodily sensation as epistemological and hermeneutic tools. In his notes on Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises, Hopkins describes his experience of self-recognition, both as a human being and as a particular individual, in extraordinarily sensory terms:

. . . I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: What must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own. Nothing explains it or resembles it, except so far as this, that other men to themselves have the same feeling. . . . But to me there is no resemblance: searching nature I taste *self* but at one tankard, that of my own being. The development, refinement, condensation of nothing shews any sign of being able to match this to me or give me another taste of it, a taste even resembling it. (282)

Deeply evocative of the awareness of existence, this passage highlights the sensory foundation of the experience of oneself; like the stone that rings because it is a stone,

one's human essence is verifiable (only) through material sense. Of course, human nature to Hopkins is different from that of a stone, but it is perceptible and demonstrable through similar means. Further, as the passage from his notes suggests, his sense of individuality – his self taste – isolates him not only from the rest of creation but also from other people: his individual composition is different from that of any other individual. In both cases – of self-recognition and of isolation from others – Hopkins's experience of his own identity comes through material sensory perception.

Hopkins's insistence on sensory perception as both epistemological and hermeneutic corresponds to his insistence on the immanence of God in the world, and it does so by correlating materiality (and the sensation and somatic experience that come with it) with morality. That is, if identity, both individual and collective, is only discoverable through material embodiment – the “selving” behaviors from “Kingfishers” – then recognition of the humanity of others is also evidenced only through shared material existence. The immanence of God in Hopkins's world is instantiated most fully in the person of Christ, but all humans (and, as I discuss above, all created things) exist in bodies that, ideally, provide avenues of Christ-like incarnation. Because in Hopkins's conception God can be known best – or perhaps only – through material incarnation (primarily of Christ but also, analogously, through human incarnation more broadly), materiality itself forms the basis of an ethics predicated on sympathetic connection. Humans approach the divine through the incarnated person of Christ, and they approach each other through the sensations and experiences of their own bodies.

Absence in the “Terrible Sonnets”

The texts that I have discussed so far make clear the extent to which materiality and embodiment are necessary for full humanity as well as their connection to the immanence of God in the world. Having established this, I turn now to a handful of sonnets written around 1885, often referred to as the “terrible” sonnets or the “dark” sonnets, in which general bodily sensation and sensory perception give way to pain. This shift to pain coincides with a shift in tone from one celebrating the immanence of Christ in the world to one horrified by the lack of divine presence. Although at least four poems have been put into this category, I focus on two that provide particularly vivid instances of physical pain and alienation.

The first, “I wake and feel,” relies upon images of pain to present the speaker as isolated from Christ, whom he has repeatedly addressed with no response:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw, ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light’s delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away. (ll. 1-8)

The speaker’s “lament / Is cries countless,” none of which receive either a response or even acknowledgement. The dead letters are undeliverable, following the metaphor to its conclusion, perhaps because of inadequate addressing or perhaps because of total absence of the intended recipient. In any case, that the letters are “dead” both suggests implicitly that they were once alive but are no longer and underscores the inadequacy and impoverishment of mortality; that they are letters rather than vocal cries indicates the

increasing corporeality (and simultaneous depersonalization) of the speaker's attempts to reach the "dearest him" he is addressing. In this formulation, the speaker's voice becomes text much as the text stands in for the body in "The Habit of Perfection." Both more material and less affective than the human voice, the "dead letters" fail to reach the intended recipient, and communication fails.

The opening line establishes the physical misery of the poem: the "fell of dark" (l. 1) suggests both the absence of light in contrast to the day the speaker expects upon waking as well as danger and the heaviness, weight, and pressure of a burden that has fallen on one's body. The physical discomfort implicit in the opening line is mirrored in the psychological distress of the rest of the stanza: "What hours, O what black hours we have spent / This night! What sights you, heart, saw, ways you went!" The "cries countless" echo the "unspeakable stress of pitch" from Hopkins's notes on Loyola; both phrases suggest the innumerability of the speaker's sensations, the impossibility of articulating the extent of the distress. Such incalculable distress evokes the concept of the sublime, particularly as articulated by Edmund Burke, who suggested the root of the sublime in the experience of pain and fear. Like the sublime, which combines the physiological sensations attendant upon pain and fear with the psychological experience of awe, Hopkins's poem presents vivid images of physiological distress tied inseparably to spiritual anguish. The speaker's characterization of himself – "I am gall, I am heartburn" (l. 9) – returns to the images of selftaste from Hopkins's retreat notes, but shifts that sense of taste from one of simple recognition of individuality to an image of his own putrescent body, rotting and souring from the inside out. Further, the experience of his selftaste is painful: he burns himself, inflicts pain on himself through his own body.

The speaker's self-characterization also reduces his existence to his body and its sensations: the heart addressed in line three returns here as heartburn (l. 9).

Pain in this poem is inescapable because it is the sum and substance of the speaker's identity:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (ll. 9-14)

The speaker's "scourge" is himself, his own "sweating" body: his self is inescapable, suggesting a sort of perversion of the inscape present in the selving of "Kingfishers." If "each mortal thing does one thing and the same; // Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells," that selving is bitter and horrifying in "I wake and feel." Rather than being the vehicle for self-recognition and realization, selving here involves the sour sweat of fear and pain, uncontrollable bodily secretions, the inescapability of self. No transcendence is possible in this model of selving, but immanence is also denied through the absolute absence of God. Not only, though, is this taste of bitterness coextensive with the speaker; further, this selftaste of bitterness is "God's most deep decree." The poem's speaker might be his own scourge, his own corporeal "curse," but that curse is also God's curse toward him. In tasting himself, the poem's speaker wallows in the rotten materiality wished on him by a God who has absented himself from the world: "Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse." If the burning pain of his selftaste springs from his own body, it is decreed by a God who, though previously incarnated, is now simply absent.

Broken into four stanzas, “I wake and feel” breaks down the typical sonnet form by dividing the octet and the sestet into two parts each, establishing through its form the fragmentation and collapse presented in the text. At the same time, the poem enacts a movement from psychological misery to physical distress. The first two stanzas present images of alienation, isolation, fear, and anxiety, while the third and fourth stanzas translate that psychological distress into the sensations and media of physical pain: gall, heartburn, bones, flesh, blood, sweat. This movement from psychological to somatic suggests an increasing objectification of both the pain and of the speaker at the same time that it suggests the inescapability of pain. In one sense, the increasing materialization of the pain suggests a reduction, a dehumanization: the speaker has become coextensive with his painful experience of his own cursed body. Communication, even the failed communication of dead letters, is no longer possible. The loss of the means of communication, combined with the sense of being reduced to a soured, sweating shell, insists on the fragmentation of the speaker’s identity and his fundamental isolation. In this poem, the increasing materiality of pain comes to be constitutive of identity and evidence of one’s abandonment by God.

This dual sense of pain is present even more markedly in “No worst.” Here Hopkins presents the infinitude of suffering that builds upon previous pain in an ever-increasing spiral:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-
Woe, wórd-sorrow; on an áge-old ánvil wínce and síng –
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked ‘No ling-

Ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.
O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

There is no limit, no absolute to the suffering possible in this conception. In this poem, as the severity of the anguish increases, its bodily specificity fades; gone are the gall and heartburn of "I wake and feel," replaced instead by "pangs" that "wilder wring." The localized pain of heartburn has been replaced by generalized agony that "wring[s]" constantly. "Wring" seems an apt description for the kind of generalized, dehumanizing, strangling pain the poem depicts. Strangulation provides an apt figure for the inarticulate, even prelinguistic sounds that replace the speaker's words: "My cries heave, herds-long . . . / . . . on an age-old anvil wince and sing –." Attempts at communication with God are replaced here not with letters (not even with dead letters) but with nearly inhuman and inarticulate sounds; the cries form herds, suggesting sheep or cattle, degenerating from human to barely even animal. Even so, these cries "heave," suggesting the physicality of the cries, of language itself. God himself is entirely absent from this poem; addressed solely as "Comforter" (l. 3), this is a depersonalized divinity rather than a human Christ. This impersonal "Comforter" offers no comfort, and neither does the thoroughly human Mary. Mary is the only named non-abstraction in the poem: the inaptly named "Comforter," the abstraction of personified "Fury," and the presumably human "Wretch" all lack even a semblance of humanity or individual identity.

In both of these poems, spiritual pain is clearly present. Yet the stark images of

physical pain – of blows struck against an anvil, of the heaving of cries for mercy and relief, of the bone and flesh and blood filled to the brim with gall and heartburn – argue against a simply spiritual interpretation of these poems. These images of intense bodily suffering suggest far more than simply an accidental, or even an incidental, choice of metaphor. Rather, they suggest that Hopkins understood bodily experience and bodily sensation to be the most fundamental characteristics of human existence: such corporeal experience defines the boundaries of the human much as Christ’s “sacred broken heart” and five wounds define him.¹⁹ Even more importantly, in spite of the extremity of the physical suffering represented in the “terrible” sonnets, the speakers’ suffering intensifies even further as disembodiment progresses. That is, as poems like “No worst” enact a shift from physical suffering to psychological trauma, they firmly associate horror (depicted vividly in lines 9 through 14) with the noncorporeal rather than with the material: far from leading to spiritual perfection, the disembodiment both represented and enacted in this sonnet suggests that such disembodiment leads directly to horror and alienation.

In fact, the poem’s grammar reinforces this lack through the absence of a subject noun: “O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall / Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap / May who ne’er hung there.” While the subject pronoun “he” may be implied and understood – “Hold them cheap / May [he] who ne’er hung there” – the absence is significant both because it further removes traces of human existence from the world of the poem and because it raises the stress already tightened

¹⁹ See note 6, above, regarding Hopkins’s description of Christ’s “sacred broken heart and His five adorable Wounds” as the means by which his father ought to approach prayer.

almost unbearably on the sonnet's syntax, rhyme scheme, and rhythmic structure. Unlike the poems discussed earlier, this sonnet has no stanza breaks, although conceptually it divides into an octet and sestet. Reversing the stanza order of "I wake and feel," the first eight lines here present images of excruciating bodily pain and the absence of God, while the last six lines depict the psychological horror that results. The pain is severe enough (especially when coupled with the complete absence of God) to drive the speaker literally over the edge, over the sheer cliffs of the mind's mountains, and his only comfort (since the comfort of a comforter God and of Mary is absent) is the idea that death, the ultimate dissolution of material human existence, will come. The shift in focus from body to mind at the invisible stanza break is underscored by the doubled invocation of the psychological perils ahead: "O the mind, mind has mountains" (l. 9). A similar doubling in the rhyme at the break of line seven ("ling- / Ering") emphasizes the speaker's state of fragmentation by breaking the word, doubles the stress on the sonnet's structure, and prolongs the "unspeakable stress of pitch" under which the speaker is laboring.

Hopkins's Poetics of Asceticism

"No worst" presents an extreme example of Hopkins's use of tortured form in his poems, but it is not categorically different from many of his other works. A number of critics have connected the intense linguistic and formal discipline of Hopkins's poems to his desire for asceticism, suggesting that Hopkins approaches the disciplined body as a means to spiritual growth rather than as a legitimate source of sensory pleasure or beauty

in itself.²⁰ Hopkins's descriptions of his own poetic practices suggest his constant attempt to create more and more finely tuned poetic structures. In an 1877 letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins describes his poetic practices in terms of law, suggesting the severity of the discipline with which he approached his practice of poetics: "Only remark, as you say that there is no conceivable licence I shd. not be able to justify, that with all my licences, or rather laws, I am stricter than you and I might say than anybody I know. With the exception of the *Bremen* stanza . . . my rhymes are rigidly good – to the ear – and such rhymes as *love* and *prove* I scout utterly. . . . So that I may say my apparent licences are counter-balanced, and more, by my strictness. In fact all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as 'licentious'" (227-28). By equating "licence" with "law," Hopkins suggests a paradoxical freedom available only through severe discipline. As an ascetic spiritual practice, Hopkins's poetry reinforces the connection between the "unspeakable stress of pitch" of an individual body (or poem) in its selving or turning outward.

In addition to the discipline apparent in the writing of these poems, a similar disciplinary experience takes place in the reading of them. If as a writer Hopkins was aware of the chastening practices he exerted over the language that was his medium, readers – particularly readers-aloud – are also necessarily aware of the material constraints of both the language and their own speaking bodies. Hopkins's poems are often difficult to read, even if one is not worried about matching the scansion indicated on many of them through the diacritical marks; his poems include sound sequences that

²⁰ See for example Julia F. Saville, *A Queer Chivalry: The Homoerotic Asceticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Charlottesville: U Press of Virginia, 2000)

turn some lines nearly into tongue-twisters. Consider the tightly packed repetition of initial and middle sounds of “Kingfishers”: “As tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s / Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name” (ll. 2-4). Syntax aside, the sounds themselves in this poem cause one to stumble, even when reading silently, and that stumbling increases when reading aloud. The irregular but frequent repetition of the short vowel sound in “tucked” – tucked, hung, swung, tongue – increases the awkwardness of pronouncing several of the consonant clusters in the lines: “Stones ring” (“s” followed immediately by “r”), “each tucked” (“ch” followed by “t,” an inversion of the usual order), “tucked string” (final “t” sound followed by “s,” which is in turn complicated by being part of an “str” consonant cluster of its own). Additionally, the frequency of single-syllable words, each of which seems stressed to one degree or another rather than falling neatly into a binary pattern of stressed/unstressed,²¹ raises the tension associated with reading the poem aloud: lines three and four consist solely of monosyllabic words, most of which carry enough semantic stress to justify strong articulation; no words slip by unnoticed in these

²¹ Hopkins was aware of the ability of sprung rhythm to avoid – or at least seriously complicate – the binary of stressed/unstressed syllables. In a December 22, 1880 letter to R. W. Dixon, Hopkins describes the pacing possibilities of sprung rhythm: “Its principle is that all rhythm and all verse consists of feet and each foot must contain one stress or verse-accent: so far is common to it and Common Rhythm; to this it adds that the stress alone is essential to a foot and that therefore even one stressed syllable may make a foot and consequently two or more stresses may come running, which in common rhythm can, regularly speaking, never happen. But there may and mostly there does belong to a foot an unaccented portion or ‘slack’: now in common rhythm in which less is made of stress, in which less stress is laid, the slack must be always one or else two syllables, never less than one and never more than two, and in most measures fixedly one or fixedly two, but in sprung rhythm, the stressing being more *of* a stress, being more important, allows of greater variation in the slack and this latter may range from three syllables to none at all” (Philips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 242). Hopkins goes on in this same letter to describe the practices of rising and falling rhythm, which allow even more variation between strongly stressed and completely unstressed syllables. The variation allowed by Hopkins’s sprung rhythm breaks down the binary system of stressed and unstressed poetic syllables in a manner that echoes the way his poems themselves break down the opposing binary between corporeality and noncorporeality.

lines, and readers must be careful to follow the (not immediately clear) grammatical pattern in order to allow pronunciation to further meaning.²² As a reader, one must roll the occasionally awkward sounds carefully and deliberately around one's mouth, feeling one's way through the pronunciation; as a result, the spoken language comes to take on a material quality and one experiences the immediacy and the sensation of the spoken words, the tactility of speech.

In this way, Hopkins's poetic practices allow the words to become corporeal, not only suggesting the connection between the poetic form and particular poems' content but insisting on the irreducibly physical experience – the embodiedness, if you will – of the poems themselves. Hopkins shares this characteristic in common with Swinburne; as Yopie Prins argues about Swinburne's poetics, the intensity of his devotion to metrical laws, particularly the laws of meter, gives his poems the corporeality of physical bodies. Through complete submission to the laws of poetic rhythm, Prins argues, the body of the poet becomes “rhythmicized” at the same time that the rhythm of the poem becomes embodied.²³ Similarly, Isobel Armstrong notes that both Hopkins and Swinburne are “obsessed with power and the law, the ‘mastering me/God’” and that “both are hypersensitively aware of the breakdown of language which they express in terms of the collapse of form and content, the breaking apart of sign and referent. Both are left with a

²² Again, Hopkins appears to have been highly conscious of his own poetic practices: in a letter of February 15, 1879 to Robert Bridges, Hopkins wrote, “But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling ‘inscape’ is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped” (Philips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 235).

²³ Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1999), 137. See Chapter 3 more generally for a discussion of Swinburne's poetics of ascesis. Prins also notes the degree to which Coventry Patmore's argument that rhythm was the corporeal element in poetry influenced the poetics of late Victorian poets.

fevered sense of the brute materiality of language: for Hopkins this means a world bereft of the organising spiritual form incarnate in matter, the materialism which rejects godhead.”²⁴ Hopkins’s poetics of ascesis, of disciplinary control, heightens the corporeality of his poems. When combined with the images of stark physical pain in the “terrible” sonnets, this poetics suggests that Hopkins understood bodily experience and bodily sensation as the irreducible characteristics of human existence.

Wells’s Technologies of Pain

Like Hopkins, H. G. Wells presents images of the inescapability of bodily pain in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, although its function in the novel is less consistent than it is in Hopkins’s poems. In addition to being the paradigmatic sense experience, it is also both the marker of insufficient evolution and a humanizing technology.²⁵ Nevertheless, the ability to experience pain, whether directly or at second-hand, figured in the novel as somatic sensitivity more generally, marks the threshold of humanity. As in Hopkins’s poems, materiality in this novel provides the foundation for sensory experience, and consequently for morality; also as in Hopkins’s poems, connection between individuals, which in the form of sympathy is the basis of the novel’s ethical system, depends on

²⁴ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 403-404.

²⁵ Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, and Machines: Science Fiction and the Cultures of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Kent: Kent State U P, 2006), reads *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as an anti-vivisection novel, but one that is more partial to the concerns of scientists than of anti-vivisection activists. According to Willis, Wells’s critique of vivisection stems far more from a desire to make scientific institutions transparent and available to the non-scientific public than from anti-vivisection ideological convictions: “In Montgomery and Prendick, the scientific community has two men whose scientific interests and sympathetic understanding of animal suffering, coupled with thoughtful defenses of its applicability, defend the correct methodologies of vivisection and provide a useful antidote to the sensationalism of the opposition” (219). See especially chapter 7 for an extended discussion of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as a critique of vivisection.

somatic experience and full embodiment. Dr. Moreau is a vivisectionist who has been living for some years on an isolated island, conducting experiments in which he attempts to turn animals into humans. It is the agony produced through Moreau's transformative surgeries that lies at the thematic center of this novel, saturating the novel with images of pain as a universal sensory experience.

The narrative begins when Edward Prendick, the narrator, is shipwrecked and eventually picked up by another ship that takes him to an exotic island. Montgomery, the man who rescues Prendick and brings him aboard the ship, is an assistant of Dr. Moreau, and both Moreau and Montgomery live on the island to which Prendick is taken. While recuperating on the mysterious island, Prendick hears and sees what he comes to believe are humans who have been tortured and mutilated to resemble animals. After confronting Moreau, Prendick learns that Moreau is a vivisectionist, a physiologist, who has been engaging for some years in a project to transform animals into human beings through surgery. The creatures Prendick had thought were mutilated humans are actually animals Moreau has transformed, with greater or lesser success, into humans. Incompletely satisfied with his success on each creature, Moreau releases them to live freely on the island after his surgery on them is complete, and they live together in a society of sorts which they have built upon what they call "the Law": a series of maxims, taught by a Kanaka missionary,²⁶ that includes prohibitions against such things as walking on all fours, drinking directly from pools of water or streams, eating flesh, scratching trees, and

²⁶ Dr. Moreau tells Prendick that the law the beast-people recite "follow[s] in the line the Kanaka missionary marked out," which gives them "a kind of mockery of a rational life." In spite of this assertion, however, much of the novel connects the law to Moreau himself, and the beast-people clearly identify him as the law-giver, regardless of its original source. H. G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 121. All references to this novel are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *M*.

chasing other creatures. The creatures live in fear of Moreau, saying “*His* is the House of Pain,” “*His* is the Hand that makes,” “*His* is the Hand that wounds,” and “*His* is the Hand that heals” (92). Eventually, one of Moreau’s unfinished creatures, a puma, escapes from the laboratory, and Moreau is killed trying to recapture it; his death leads to the end of the law and consequently to the disintegration of the beast-people’s social organization. Montgomery is also killed by one of the Beast People, while Prendick co-exists with them as one of their equals for some time before managing to escape from the island. Eventually, while drifting without direction in his dinghy, he is picked up by a passing ship and returned to England, where he now lives in a state of anxiety and isolation, fearing that he sees in the middle-class people around him echoes of the Beast People he left behind.

As a vivisectionist, Dr. Moreau inflicts pain on the creatures as he transforms them surgically into humans; more specifically, he explores the boundaries of humanness through the use of pain as both humanizing technology and evolutionary measure. According to Moreau, since pain’s actual purpose is to warn of danger and injury to the body, advanced evolution of an organism would render such a warning system obsolete because an individual’s intelligence would provide a more effective warning ahead of time than would a bodily reaction to injury already inflicted. Consequently, pain, even where it exists, is of no consequence to Moreau: ““This pain,”” he says, explaining his position to a skeptical Prendick, ““Oh! but it is such a little thing. A mind truly open to what science has to teach must see that it is a little thing”” (*M* 113). After calling Prendick a materialist, Moreau explains that ““so long as visible or audible pain turns you sick, so long as your own pain drives you, so long as pain underlies your propositions

about sin, so long, I tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels” (M 113). Moreau’s dismissal of pain marks his own evolutionary superiority, as he demonstrates for Prendick when he stabs himself in the thigh with a penknife, claiming to feel no pain. “The capacity for pain is not needed in the muscle, and it is not placed there . . . Pain is simply our intrinsic medical adviser to warn us and stimulate us . . . [W]ith men, the more intelligent they become the more intelligently they will see after their own welfare, and the less they will need the goad to keep them out of danger. I never yet heard of a useless thing that was not ground out of existence by evolution sooner or later” (M 114). Within Moreau’s system of evolutionary logic, the inability to feel pain corresponds to a higher degree of evolution. Yet Moreau also associates a lack of pain with lower organisms: “Plants do not feel pain; the lower animals – it’s possible that such animals as the starfish and crayfish do not feel pain” (M 114).²⁷ While this inconsistency over the implications of sensitivity to pain may make Moreau’s position less reliable scientifically, the narrative effect of both statements is nevertheless to focus on the experience of pain as a meaningful measure of evolutionary progress.

Moreover, Moreau insists that humans who respond to pain are not only insufficiently evolved but are also morally questionable: “This store men and women set on pleasure and pain, Prendick, is the mark of the beast upon them, the mark of the beast

²⁷ This position regarding the lack of sensitivity to pain among less developed organisms was a common one during the nineteenth century. G. H. Lewes argued, as did many others, that animals like frogs felt little or no pain during vivisection. In testimony he gave to a “Royal Commission on the Practice of Subjecting Live Animals to Experiments for Scientific Purposes,” Lewes gave as his reason for believing in the absence of pain the idea that “We know that among human beings, especially when you descend to the savages, the sensibility to pain becomes less and less.” Quoted in Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection: G. H. Lewes and George Eliot” (*ELH* 67 [2000], 617-53), 625-26.

from which they came. Pain! Pain and pleasure – they are for us, only so long as we wriggle in the dust . . .” (*M* 115). Moreau’s “mark of the beast” refers explicitly to the taint of animality conferred by responsiveness to material sensation, but it carries connotations of immorality as well.²⁸ According to Moreau, it is only selfishness and self-interestedness that makes people subject to the demands of pain and pleasure; without fear of pain or desire for pleasure, people would act rationally and would consequently, in Moreau’s formulation, become more human. Although pain and pleasure need not be strictly material experiences, which Moreau acknowledges, he insists that the fear and desire he associates with pain and pleasure are always at root a concern for material being: “So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick, so long as your own pain drives you, so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin . . .” Whether pain is something one experiences directly in one’s own body, indirectly through witnessing the pain of another, or metaphorically through fear of punishment, pain for Moreau is always a fundamentally material experience and, consequently, an experience of animality.

And yet, in spite of the fact that Moreau associates responsiveness to pain with animality and immunity to pain with fully evolved humanity, he uses pain as a humanizing technology on his vivisected beast-people. Some of that pain is inflicted simply as a necessary consequence of surgery without anesthesia.²⁹ Some, however, is

²⁸ In terms of Christian prophesy, the “mark of the beast” is a mark on the hand or forehead that signifies submission to the beast that will rule the earth before the battle of Armageddon. Wells’s image draws explicitly on the evolutionary narrative he has told, but the phrase clearly recalls the passages from the Book of Revelation.

²⁹ Lucy Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late-Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000), discusses at length the history of pain control, including the development of anesthesia for surgery. In addition, Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection,” discusses both the first use of sulfuric

intentional, and Moreau explicitly identifies his use of pain as a means of humanizing the animals: “Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say, This time I will burn out all the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own” (*M* 120). The pain Moreau inflicts is the consequence of the vivisection; it is also evidence of the creatures’ inherent animality; and, in this latest articulation, it is a technology whereby animals may become people.

However, Moreau’s argument here is circular: the application of pain will “burn out . . . the animal” and make the creature rational; but, once the creature is rational, it will be immune to pain and consequently beyond the reach of Moreau’s influence. The Law upon which Moreau relies is a similarly circular mechanism: it is designed to make them rational, *human* creatures whose behavior is guided by a disinterested social impulse rather than the desire for personal gratification that giving into instincts would allow; yet it is only effective because the Beast People fear pain at Moreau’s hands if they violate any of the prohibitions. When Moreau pays a visit to the Beast People’s community after some rabbits are killed, the Beast People begin a recitation of the Law, including the prohibition on eating meat. Moreau tells them that this prohibition has been broken, and the Sayer of the Law responds, “‘None escape’,” only to be echoed by the rest of the Beast People. “‘Who breaks the Law –’ said Moreau . . . ‘ – goes back to the House of Pain,’ they all clamored; ‘goes back to the House of Pain, O Master!’” (*M* 142-43). While Moreau has told Prendick that he did not institute the Law, he makes full use of it as a mechanism of social control. Yet his manipulation of it may be too effective:

ether as an anesthetic during surgery in 1846 and G. H. Lewes’s enthusiastic response to the use of anesthetics during vivisection, a practice that made it possible for him to work on live animal subjects in a laboratory.

the fear of the pain Moreau inflicts in “humanizing” the animals is so intense that it outweighs all other concerns and actually drives some of the Beast People to rebel completely. The Leopard Man does this, attacking Moreau the instant Moreau has turned away: “[T]he Leopard Man, released from Moreau’s eye, had risen straight from his knees, and now, with eyes aflame and his huge feline tusks flashing out from under his curling lips, leapt towards his tormentor. I am convinced that only the madness of unendurable fear could have prompted this attack” (*M* 143). Thus, the humanizing “Law” only works so long as the Beast People are not fully human; if they were to become human and consequently to become immune to either the desire for pleasure or the fear of pain, the Law would no longer be effective because the pain that comes from breaking the law would be no deterrent.

If the Leopard Man’s intense fear of pain would mark him, in Moreau’s estimation, as irrational and inhuman, Prendick comes to a different judgment. As Prendick runs with Moreau, Montgomery, and the Beast People in the hunt to recapture the Leopard Man, he comes to see the Leopard Man as simultaneously more animal and more human than he had appeared previously. When Prendick first catches a glimpse of him during the hunt, he notices that the Leopard Man “was still clothed, and, at a distance, its face still seemed human, but the carriage of its four limbs was feline, and the furtive droop of its shoulder was distinctly that of a hunted animal” (*M* 145). Soon, though, the Leopard Man is trapped in some bushes, and Prendick sees him in an entirely different, if more confusing, way: “I saw the creature we were hunting. I halted. He was crouched together into the smallest possible compass, his luminous green eyes turned over his shoulder regarding me. It may seem a strange contradiction in me – I cannot

explain the fact – but now, seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes, and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, I realized again the fact of its humanity” (*M* 147). For Prendick, it is the creature’s terror, its ability to anticipate and fear the coming pain, that makes it human.

By the time he helps to hunt the Leopard Man, the novel has already established Prendick’s sensitivity to pain. Soon after arriving on the island, Prendick hears “a sharp, hoarse cry of animal pain” (*M* 57) that quickly escalates in intensity until it becomes intolerable:

I found myself that the cries were singularly irritating, and they grew in depth and intensity as the afternoon wore on. They were painful at first, but their constant resurgence at last altogether upset my balance. I flung aside a crib of Horace I had been reading and began to clench my fist, to bite my lips, and pace the room. Presently I got to stopping my ears with my fingers. The emotional appeal of those yells grew upon me steadily, grew at last to such an exquisite expression of suffering that I could stand it in that confined room no longer . . . The crying sounded even louder out of doors. It was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice. (*M* 58-59)

Prendick’s sensitivity is what prompts Moreau to label him a materialist, saying that he is motivated by fear of pain and desire for pleasure. And in Moreau’s estimation, this suggests that Prendick is incompletely evolved, not fully *human*. Yet it is Prendick’s sensitivity to pain, both his own and that of others, that marks him for the reader as *humane*. Prendick’s sensitivity to material sensations underlies his ability to empathize with the vivisected puma, and it is what allows him to see the Leopard Man as human when he was most fully animal: hunted, helpless, terrified. Prendick explicitly identifies the basis of his sympathy in sensation: “Yet had I known such pain was in the next room, and had it been dumb, I believe – I have thought since – I could have stood it well enough. It is when suffering finds a voice and sets our nerves quivering that this pity

comes troubling us” (*M* 59). For Moreau, the ability of one’s nerves to be set quivering signifies only one’s own irrationality and, consequently, incomplete humanity; for Prendick (and, I suspect, for us as readers), such somatic sensitivity is the foundation for humane-ness itself.

Disembodiment, Divine Absence, and Humane Bodies

Pain permeates Wells’s novel, from the creation of the Beast People at Moreau’s hands, to their control by Moreau’s and Montgomery’s whips, to the Law they repeat. In rising above pain, Moreau insists, the beasts will come human. Becoming inured to pain altogether is, in Moreau’s view, to advance up the evolutionary hierarchy, progressing through the various stages of human-ness and eventually (at least in theory) to the disembodied, completely non-sensory perfection of divinity. These pervasive representations of bodily sensation in general, and of pain more specifically, highlight some of the consequences of material embodiment. When material embodiment vanishes, as it does in both Wells’s novel and Hopkins’s terrible sonnets, the result is a sense of abandonment and terror as well as, most importantly, the disappearance of the basis of morality.

As in Hopkins’s terrible sonnets, pain exists in this novel as the paradigmatic sense experience: the creatures’ transformation into humans is excruciating, and fear of that pain underlies the law they recite. While other physiological sensations exist in the poems and in the novel, representations of physical pain bear much of the ideological weight and carry a large portion of the affective charge of each text. This emphasis within the text resonates with a more general sense that pain is the most physical of

sensations and the most difficult to ignore.³⁰ When one feels physical pain, one may be rendered incapable of maintaining awareness of anything except one's own pained body; when one experiences emotional or psychological pain, that emotional pain may also be experienced simultaneously as physiological distress. Even when the sonnets' use of images of pain does not reflect literal bodily pain, the choice of metaphors evocative of physical pain suggest that such physical pain is the most basic of human experiences, and certainly the most fundamental of senses. That Wells's novel is similarly saturated with representations of bodily pain suggests a similar belief in pain as the most basic and inescapable sensory experience.

After his death, Moreau becomes a distant, invisible god, the lawgiver who sees all and punishes all but remains unseen: Prendick tells the beast people who find Moreau's dead body, "He has changed his shape – he has changed his body . . . for a time you will not see him. He is . . . there' – I pointed upward – 'where he can watch you. You cannot see him. But he can see you. Fear the Law'" (*M* 163). Moreau's death, in which bodily presence is replaced by an unverifiable panoptic surveillance that threatens punishment for any infraction against the Beast People's law code, finalizes a process begun earlier in the novel, in which Moreau asserts his immunity to pain as well as his immunity to sympathetic suffering. After stabbing himself in the thigh to demonstrate the unimportance of pain, Moreau describes his own approach to his animal experiments: "The thing before you is no longer an animal, a fellow-creature, but a problem.

³⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1985), argues that pain, for the one who experiences it, is more real and undeniable than any other experience; at the same time, she notes that when one is not in pain, reports of others' pain seem equally unbelievable, even unreal.

Sympathetic pain – all I know of it I remember as a thing I used to suffer from years ago. I wanted – it was the only thing I wanted – to find out the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape” (*M* 115).³¹ In other words, the real, material animal becomes a theoretical, nonmaterial concept. The correlation between Moreau’s lack of sympathy and his lack of ability to experience pain is not coincidental. Rather, even in life, Moreau’s denigration of material life and bodily sensation suggests not his advanced progression up the evolutionary ladder but rather his inhumaneness. To state this more directly: Moreau’s refusal of materiality signifies not his closeness to perfection but his complete amorality. Moreau’s post-mortem transition (made, admittedly, without his consent or agency) from doctor to god-figure, simply literalizes the inhumaneness and amorality he demonstrated throughout the novel.

In this capacity, Moreau bears striking resemblance to the angry God, by turns violent and absent, of Hopkins’s terrible sonnets, the Christ who refuses to answer prayers, Hopkins’s “cries like dead letters sent / to dearest him that lives alas! away” (“I wake and feel” ll. 7-8). In Hopkins’s sonnets, dis-Incarnation – whether of God or of humans – is accompanied by isolation and utter alienation. When either humans or Christ loses material embodiment in Hopkins’s poems, communication fails utterly as does the speaker’s humanity itself, and isolation, alienation, and terror result. Daniel Harris, writing about Hopkins’s terrible sonnets, notes that “No worst” suggests through a

³¹ Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection,” cites the position of experimental physiologist Claude Bernard on vivisection: “Bernard claimed that ‘[a] physiologist is not a man of fashion, he is a man of science: he no longer hears the cry of animals, he no longer sees the blood that flows, he sees only his idea and perceives only organisms concealing problems which he intends to solve.’ With a phrase that would please Foucault, he observed that often ‘vivisection is only anatomical dissection of the living’” (652, footnote 66; quoted material is from Claude Bernard, *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, trans. Henry Copley Greene [1865; rpt. New York: Dover, 1957], 103, 104).

heretical pun a nightmare of dis-Incarnation: “The phrase [no-man-fathomed] hints that the ‘no-man’ who did fathom the ‘cliffs of fall’ was Christ. Once accepted, the pun shows Hopkins’s speaker toying with the Monophysite heresy . . . by denying Christ’s humanity; and in rejecting His [Christ’s] dual nature, he [Hopkins’s speaker] simultaneously loses the divine Presence who, incarnate in mundane things, substantiates their form and being.”³² To paraphrase Harris, if the “no-man” of the poem – the one who is not man, not human – is Christ, then Hopkins’s speaker flirts with the Monophysite heresy, recently revived by Newman, which denies the human-ness of Christ, claiming instead that Christ was only divine. If, Harris continues, Christ’s humanity is eliminated, then so is the foundational principle of the material existence of the world. That is, by denying the material embodiment – the complete humanity – of Christ, Hopkins’s poem eliminates the structure necessary for the very world to exist: “Hopkins’s imagery thus renders, in the most intimate terms possible, his experience of dis-Incarnation.”³³ Consequent to Christ’s dis-incarnation, the world itself becomes a place of complete and utter alienation and isolation. Hopkins’s speakers, in these poems, have no access to God, no access to other humans. Consequently, with the removal of the possibility of human connection, humanity itself becomes unsustainable. Because these poems so clearly equate humane-ness with material embodiment through the image of the incarnated Christ, the absence of material embodiment signifies, and enacts, fundamental alienation and inhumanity. While Moreau’s disappearance from the novel is not equivalent to Christ’s disappearance from Hopkins’s poems, it does suggest an

³² Harris, *Inspirations Unbidden*, 52.

³³ Harris, *Inspirations Unbidden*, 55.

ultimate alignment between Moreau's amoral unconcern for suffering and his eventual transformation into disembodied and insensate Law. Never humane even when he was alive, Moreau-as-Law is a model of the equation of disembodiedness with amorality.

If Moreau's insensitivity to pain suggests his inhumaneness, Prendick's sensitivity to it indicates its importance to the system of morality the novel seems to support. After describing his response to the puma's cries of pain during Moreau's vivisection of it, Prendick suggests the importance of sensory perception in his experience of sympathy for the creature. Although there is a certain amount of imaginative identification in Prendick's response, it is primarily a physiological reaction to perceived bodily pain that prompts his reaction.³⁴ Moreau – without sensitivity to the suffering evidenced by the animal screams around him – operates outside of any system of morality, becoming a disembodied, distant, temporarily fear-inspiring god to the Beast People. Hopkins's Christ – “lovely in limbs” and present in the material world in most of the poems, but turned into a terrifying tyrant in the terrible sonnets in which all hints of materiality and embodiment are stripped from him – evidences the terror, danger, and amorality attendant upon dis-Incarnation.

I began by suggesting that I was going to argue for a reversal of the generally accepted Cartesian duality of body and spirit. The use made by Hopkins and Wells of vivid images of bodies and materiality, and especially of sensation in general and pain in

³⁴ Prendick's apparent sympathy for the suffering creature behind the door changes when he discovers that it is a vivisected animal rather than a tortured human being. I would argue that, although Prendick's immediate self-interest is less threatened by the tortured animal than it was by the idea of a tortured person, the fact remains that Prendick *feels* within his own body and through his own senses a version of the pain whose evidence he hears. Prendick may not carry the full moral weight of the novel – certainly some of his actions seem questionable, and it seems unlikely that he speaks with Wells's voice for much of the novel – but in this instance his ability to feel pain makes him the only character to approach the version of moral positioning I believe the novel wants to enact.

particular, provides convincing evidence of the importance of the body to both writers. Further, by noting the instances in which embodiment fails, I hope to have made clear the terrifying consequences of such disembodied, non-humane spirituality. In the system of morality that I suggest is implicit in these texts, the material corresponds to the moral and to the humane, while the non-material corresponds to the amoral, which is not necessarily evil but is certainly not bound to concern for suffering. Hopkins, a devout Jesuit whose poetry alternately celebrates the presence and mourns the absence of Christ, and Wells, a one-time science teacher who studied under T. H. Huxley before turning to writing the so-called “scientific romances” firmly grounded in contemporary scientific discovery, appear at first to have little in common, and I do not want to suggest that there are not important differences between them. Were the two men to have a conversation together concerning the topics I discuss here, it seems unlikely that they would share many, if any, conclusions, particularly concerning the ultimate benevolence of God. I imagine that Hopkins would steadily maintain the perfection of God, while Wells (at least the Wells who wrote *Moreau*) might express some skepticism regarding either the benevolence or the omnipotence of God. Given these important differences, however, equally important points of contact exist between and among the texts I have discussed here. Neither Hopkins nor Wells makes an explicit statement concerning the conclusion I draw from their texts – that the entirely spiritual and perfectly dis-Incarnated God is inhumane and amoral. The blasphemy potential (if not fully realized) in that statement may make it nearly unspeakable for both Hopkins and Wells. And yet, if one follows each text’s argument to its extreme, yet logical, conclusion, the result is an insistence on the connection between materiality and humane-ness: Wells’s novel and Hopkins’s poems

insist that when God dis-incarnates, grace is transformed into abandonment; when humans disincarnate, physical pain turns into horror. While one may or may not be human without a noncorporeal essence, one cannot be humane – moral – without a body.

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